THE CLOCK OF NATURE

HUGH MACMILLAN D.D.

The Clock of Nature

"'Twas a lovely thought to mark the hours,
As they floated in light away,
By the opening and the fading flowers,
That laugh to the summer's day."

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By

Hugh Macmillan

D.D. LL.D. F.R.S.E. &c.

Author of

'Bible Teachings in Nature" "The Gate Beautiful"

"The Daisies of Nazareth" &c. &c.

London: Isbister & Co. Ltd.

15 & 16 Tavistock Street Covent Garden

MDCCCCII

First Edition	.	*November* 1896
Second ,,	.	*December* 1896
Third ,,	.	*May* 1897
Fourth ,,	.	*July* 1898
Fifth ,,	.	*May* 1902

Printed by Ballantyne, Hanson & Co.
London & Edinburgh

Preface

THE title of this book, taken from that of the first chapter, indicates its nature and scope. Based upon our Lord's parable of the leafing of the fig-tree, as a forecast of the coming summer, and therefore as a sign of greater events and higher truths, the various chapters are meant to expand the significance and adaptation of the parable. They attempt to bring out the wise lessons which the objects of Nature teach ; to show how He, who put the music of the ocean in a shell, put all heaven in the eye of a flower. They seek to minister to that "second sight" which beholds in Nature a world that appeals, not to the mind only, but also to the soul, and sees the Lord God

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walking in the garden in the cool of the day They were all used in the pulpit, in the first instance for the benefit of the young ; though they may not perhaps be less adapted, on that account, for the teaching of the old. Some of the chapters have already appeared in the religious periodicals; but the majority are now printed for the first time. And I trust that they may all help to illustrate the spiritual revelation of God in Christ, by the revelation of God in Nature, and prove that, as the dial of a clock reveals the unseen movements within its case, so the visible world reveals the working of the invisible.

HUGH MACMILLAN.

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The Clock of Nature

"*And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.*"

LUKE xxi. 29, 30.

IN the Holy Land most of the trees and shrubs are evergreen; and the fig-tree is almost the only one that sheds its leaves every year. It seems therefore strange to see it in the depth of winter, with its bare white branches that look as if they were covered with perpetual hoar-frost, while all the other trees around are covered with deep green

leaves. Our Lord noticed this striking contrast, for He kept His eyes always open to see the works of His Father. He saw every year, in the beginning of March, the white branches of the fig-trees putting forth green buds, which rapidly expanded in the warm air, until the naked tree was clothed with great masses of beautiful foliage. And He knew when He saw this familiar sight that the summer was nigh at hand. He saw also that even in the evergreen trees, which seemed to be the same all the year round, there was a difference between their winter and their summer state ; that while the old leaves continued in their unfading verdure, young leaves of softer and more tender green appeared at the tips of the branches in summer, and a brighter hue came over the whole foliage.

All these beautiful changes were the signs of Nature's reviving under the quickening influences of the summer sunshine. And He made of these common sights of Nature a parable to teach the disciples heavenly lessons. These were God's telegraphic signals which he who ran could read. They foretold that

a season of joyful blessing and fruiting was drawing near. And so He said to the disciples that there were great and startling events about to happen in their land and in the Holy City, and that these events cast their shadows before. Certain things would appear before these events took place which would be prophecies of their coming; which would herald them as surely as the tender buds of the fig-tree heralded the full verdure of summer. The same Providence that watched over the changes of Nature, controlled the affairs of men, and had its own appropriate time and way of bringing about the great revolutions of the world.

It is not by artificial clocks and watches that people in remote places find out the different periods of time. The old Egyptians and Assyrians studied the heavens, and judged from the position of well-known stars when it was time to sow their fields, when the inundation of the Nile and Euphrates would come to fertilise their soil, and when they should keep their great festivals in honour of their gods. The people in Tartary know

that it is time to begin their ploughing when the sun shines down their chimneys, and makes a bright gleam on a particular part of the floor of their huts. During midsummer in Finland there is no darkness at night to render visible a single star. When the first star therefore shows itself, the people know that the year has turned, and that before long their brief summer will be dead. The sun has always been the great timekeeper for all races and climes, civilised and barbarian alike. The Druid circles of stones, like Stonehenge and Callernish, scattered over the moors, were set up in such an order as to serve the purpose of sundials or rude observatories, and to give the time of noon during the solstice and equinox. The people of the East, still as of old, measure time by the length of their shadow; and in the seventh chapter of Job we find it written "as a servant earnestly desireth his shadow"—that is, the lengthened shadow that tells him when it is time to leave off work. And in our own country the herd-boy, watching his cows on the lonely hillside, can tell you the time of day by looking to the sky and

seeing in what quarter of it the sun is, or by putting a number of sticks in the turf in a circle like the figures of a sundial, and marking the place where the shadow of a particular stick falls.

God has made the largest and most wonderful of all clocks, whose dial is the circle of the fields and mountains around you, whose pendulum, by which it is kept in motion, is the revolution of the earth in its orbit round the sun, and whose figures are the changes of the seasons, the blossoming and the fading of the flowers, and the appearance and disappearance of the leaves on the trees. This clock is thus, you see, not a mere machine, composed of dead materials, and put together by mechanical skill. It is a living clock, and all its figures are living objects, and all its signals of time are made by the changes that come upon living things in consequence of this growing or fading. Its wheels are the wheels of life, and all its movements are the movements of life ; and, therefore, there is a more interesting correspondence between it and our human lives, and the lessons which it teaches

are more suitable and impressive. Our Lord was familiar with this wonderful clock which His Father had made and kept going ever since the creation of the world. He had consulted it often when He wandered over the hills and valleys of Palestine, and it was the guide by which He regulated the duties of His life. All His movements on earth were timed to the motions of the heavens. He kept step in harmonious living with the music of the spheres.

Teaching is required to enable a child to tell what o'clock it is on the small dial of its father's watch, or on the large face of the grandfather's clock in the lobby. You cannot make out by nature or instinct what the hands and the figures mean. You have to be instructed, and it is only after much pains that you become expert in this kind of lore. But the interpretation of Nature's clock does not require any special training or teaching. It comes to most people by simple observation and experience. Our Lord said to His disciples, Ye see and know *of your own selves* what the meaning of the shooting of

the fig-tree and all the trees is; how it foretells the coming summer. And so, when you see the pale petals of the Christmas rose,—which seems to be the gift of Nature brought to welcome the birth of Jesus Christ, as the frankincense, myrrh, and gold of the Wise Men of the East was the gift of man to Him,—you know that it is December or January. When the snowdrop that changes the dead snow into a living blossom,—and being the first living thing to offer its homage to God, dare not so much as to lift up its eyes to Him,—peers above the lawn, you know that it is February. When you see the yellow daffodils coming up like sunbeams through the dark mould, you know that it is March; and when you gather in the woods the primroses, with serene faces upturned to the sky, fearless because guileless, you know that it is April. When the hawthorn covers the green hedges and blindfolds the leaves with its lace-like veils of scented blossoms, you know that it is May; and when the wild-roses are blushing on the wayside bushes, you know

that it is June. When the bluebells are chiming their fairy tones in the breeze on every bank, you know that summer is past and that autumn is coming on; and when the apples have rosy cheeks in the orchards, and the golden corn is waving in the fields, you know that it is September; and when the hips and haws have dropped their live coals among the faded foliage, you know that it is the sunset of the year, when the days are growing cold and dark and short. Thus these flowery figures are signs on the great dial of Nature's clock, which tell you annually, with an accuracy that is most wonderful, the time of the year. There are twelve months in the year, as there are twelve figures on the face of the clock, and each month has its own flowers. There are different flowers that come out every month of the year, and each keeps to its own appointed time, as the stars keep to their own fixed orbits. No one comes out too soon or too late.

Country people, who have very observant eyes, look in January for the catkins of the nazel fluttering in the chill breeze; and in

March for the downy buds that clothe the willow-wands ; and in the middle of April for the bright green "cocks and hens" of the young leaves strutting on the brown boughs of the chestnut-trees ; and in the middle of May for the unfolding of the black buds of the sullen ash, and the changing of their cold reserve into the spreading of their fingered leaves in benediction upon the genial air. And when they see the maple-trees hanging down their rosy bunches of keys from every twig, they know that the doors of summer have been thrown wide open, and all its wealth of rich foliage has come out to the sun.

Not only can you tell the time of the year in this manner by the big figures of the large hour-hand, as it were, on the face of the clock, such as the changes of the trees, and by the small minute-hand, such as the changes of the flowers ; but you can find it out even by the hand that tells the seconds, by the growth of the smallest and humblest things of Nature. On the turfy top of a wall by the wayside I saw one lovely spring day, in the

Highlands of Perthshire, little tufts of the apple-moss putting forth their slender pink stems, crowned with the lovely liliputian fruit, like fairy apples ; for this lowly plant, too, in its hidden nook, where hardly any one would have noticed it, felt the influence of the April air, and spread its hidden beauty to the sunshine. And if in the middle of July I go out into the pine-woods, I know of a certainty that I shall find the first hint of autumn decay in the sudden appearance of yellow toadstools among the grass, that will be yet fresh and green.

But there is another wonder still about this great clock of Nature. It tells you the hours of the day, as well as the months of the year. Linnæus noticed that different plants opened and closed their flowers even in fine weather at different hours of the day; and by watching this curious succession, he was able, after a while, to construct a floral clock. The convolvulus opens its flowers at three o'clock in the morning ; the poppy at five o'clock ; the dandelion at seven ; the water-lily at eight ; while the passion-flower expands its wide blue

dials at nine o'clock. The goat's-beard opens at four in the morning and closes just before twelve, whence its rural name of John-go-to-bed-at-noon; and farmers' boys are said in some parts to regulate their dinner-time by it. During the day a relay of flowers open and close at regular intervals till the sun sets, when most flowers close their blossoms and fall asleep. The daisy opens at sunrise and closes at sunset, whence its poetic name "day's eye." But there are some strange kinds, nightingales of flowers, like the cereus, the catchfly and the evening-primrose, that open their blossoms at sunset, and shine in the darkness of night like little ghostly moons. By studying these things, by observing the changes of Nature during the seasons, and the changes that take place in the herbs of the fields around you, you will be able to tell the hour of the day and the time of the year.

This clock never stops. It goes on year after year and age after age unfailingly. The seasons come and go; the flowers flourish and die; the trees shoot forth their young

buds, and wither and decay at the present day, as they did when the Flood vanished and the new earth began, as at the first, to go through its periodic changes of seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. God keeps it all up according to His covenant promise, which He made when Noah came down from the ark. Just as the clock moves on, whether there is joy or sorrow in the house, so the great clock of Nature marks the passing seasons and the passing hours, whatever may be the experiences of our human lot. Old-fashioned people superstitiously stop the clock in the house when some one is lying dead in it, as if time for that person were no more; but the clock of Nature goes on on the day of our death as on the day of our birth. It will mark the seasons for other eyes when ours are long hid in the dust; and the flowers will open and close upon our graves, taking their being at our breast, as they opened and closed in the garden sepulchre around the tomb in which slept the Lord of Life Himself. The quiet clock of Nature goes on unresting, un-

hasting. Nature is so constant, because God is a faithful Creator. He suffers not the changes of the seasons and the changes of the day to be moved, because He Himself is not moved, and we shall not be moved if we have faith in Him.

Four thousand years ago the Egyptian embalmers put the mighty Pharaoh who persecuted the Israelites into his coffin, and they placed beside him, as we do with our dead, a number of flowers that were in bloom at the time. When the coffin was opened some years ago, after this long, long sleep, the flowers were found dry and withered around the shrunken mummy, but still sufficiently distinct to show that they were the very same flowers which at that very time were putting forth their blossoms on the banks of the Nile near at hand. And the scientific men knew, from these frail tokens, which shared in the earthly immortality of the dead, that it was in the month of May that the great Pharaoh was laid in his tomb. The explorers of the buried town of Pompeii came one day upon the impression of a

pomegranate blossom, stamped upon the ashes caused by the eruption of Vesuvius that had overwhelmed the town; and there around them at the very time of the discovery, the pomegranate-trees were unfolding their scarlet blossoms in the sunny air, and they knew that Pompeii was destroyed during the season when the pomegranate flowers. It is strange thus to connect the date of the death of one of the mightiest monarchs that ever lived, and the date of the destruction of a renowned city of antiquity, with such a trivial thing as the time of the flowers appearing on the earth. And strangest of all is our Lord connecting the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world itself with the budding of the fig-tree.

The greatest festival of Japan is held during the cherry-blossom season, when the whole population casts aside all work and goes forth gaily dressed to the country tea-houses, and gives itself up to feasting and merriment. It is not the prospect of fruit or harvest that calls forth this great national rejoicing, for the tree that bears the double blossoms yields

no fruit. It is simply the beauty of the blossoms themselves. The people associate their happiness with it, not as a political emblem or as a religious symbol, but entirely for its own sake. It is the sign of their own life. Our times are in God's hands, and so are the times of the grass of the field which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven. And does it not teach you impressively that all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the field? The grass withereth and the flower fadeth; but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.

Now why has God given you this wonderful clock, given it to rich and poor—to those who have no other watches or clocks? Does it not teach you first the great elementary commonplace lesson that time is rapidly passing away? The signs of your watches and clocks, amid the common circumstances of your life do not affect you much, and had you no other means of reckoning the passing of time, you would pay comparatively little attention to it, except as fixing the hours of your work and rest, and the times of your

engagements. But God has connected the passing of time with the changes of the seasons, with the blossoming and the fading of the trees and flowers, in order that it might be pictured forth to you in such a way that you could not but notice it and think about it. You see the changes that are going on in yourself reflected in the mirror of the changes that are going on in Nature around you, and you are far more impressed by these visible illustrations, appealing to your eye, than you could be if the truth were conveyed in so many words to your mind. When you think that it is living things that are thus marking the hours of the day and the months of the year by the phases of their perishing life, your heart is touched by thoughts of the frailty of your own life, which, like the flowers, in the morning flourisheth and in the evening is cut down and withereth. The clock of Nature does not tick the minutes nor strike the hours, but its quiet ceaseless movement, its eternal going on and never stopping, year after year and age after age, teaches you in the most solemn manner, that your own

time which it so silently registers, is quickly going, and that it must be seized and used as it is passing, else it will have gone for ever and cannot be recalled. Each tree has but a brief period for its unfolding; each flower has but a short time in which to blossom; and so you have but a short period in which to fulfil the purpose of your life. The clock of Nature says to you that if you do not sow in March you will not reap in harvest; that if you will not shoot forth the bud and blossom of spring and summer you will not bear the fruit of autumn.

You cannot retrace your steps to correct the mistakes of your early years. The miracle of the shadow returning backward ten degrees will not take place on the dial of your life; and if you fail to improve the opportunities of the spring-time, when the summer comes you cannot go back and remedy your remissness. Your youth is given to you as the season of learning. This is the time for cultivating the memory and for acquiring knowledge, and for subduing the wayward will and the passionate temper. If you pass

out of your youth untaught and undisciplined, you cannot by any after efforts of your own make up for this neglect and misuse of your time. You may be able indeed to do something to retrieve the past, but you will never be what you might have been had you been faithful and diligent in your youth. And what youth is to manhood, this life is to the life beyond death. Life is one—continuous, here and hereafter. What you have made yourselves on earth you will be in the eternal world; and there will be no restoration of the youthful years you have lost—no living over again of the spring you have wasted here. It is a very solemn thought that is thus brought before you by the changing of the seasons. The fig-tree forecasts by its tender buds in spring what it is going to be in summer, when it is covered with foliage, hiding beneath its glossy greenness the plump purple fruit; and so the child is father of the man, and prophet of its future life; its days, if growing in the mould of youthful obedience, being linked each to each by piety, or, if growing in the mould of disobedience, de-

veloping a greater rankness and strength of evil.

The Wise Man says that "everything is beautiful in its season," and I may add *only* in its season. The snowdrop suits the cloudy skies, the leafless trees and the snow-covered soil around it. It is in its proper element, it harmonises with its surroundings; and we feel at once how appropriate it is, how it cheers us in the wintry gloom, and awakens hope amid the desolation of Nature. But if, by any chance, the snowdrop were not to bloom till April, it would then be born out of due season, and it would be out of harmony with the scenes around. It would chill our sensibilities by reminding us of snowy fields and dark, cold skies. It would awaken no hope or gladness in our hearts; for the time when it could have done this is past. We are now in a new season, with other wants and wishes and hopes before us, to which the snowdrop has no special meaning. And therefore we should not see in the belated snowdrop that happened to come out in April a fourth of the beauty that we see in it when it

comes at its own proper time in January or February. Who cares for a primrose in June or July, when the woods and fields are filled with other flowers, and a wealth of embarrassing beauty is spread out everywhere? You do not need it then; and its sunny face seems lost in the midst of the luxuriance of Nature. But when we see the clump of primroses in the leafless wood at the end of March, or adorning a southern bank in the beginning of April, when there is almost no other flower to compete with it, how lovely is its smile, how it thrills your heart with April blood, and sets you thinking of all bright and heavenly things!

And so in your life everything is beautiful in its season, and only in its season. Childhood has its own special bud, and youth its characteristic flower, and manhood its own mature foliage, and old age its own ripened fruit; and each of these must appear at the right time, else it will be out of keeping with its surroundings, and will lose much of the peculiar charm or value which it possessed. We do not like to see childish-

ness in mature life, nor an old head upon young shoulders, nor a prematurely careful heart in a child. What is most becoming in your early spring-time is the pure snowdrop of youthful piety. That flower of grace is most appropriate to childhood and youth. It is most beautiful then, most in harmony with the natural innocence and simplicity of that period of life. It has a freshness and charm about it which vanishes in later years. It brings heaven down to earth, and Eden back to man.

Seek, then, to grow as the snowdrops and primroses of spring grow, to put forth, as they do, in their season, the qualities that are most suitable to your time of life. The life that has no youthful piety in it—that waits till manhood or the late years of life to acquire a withered form of piety—is like a year that has no snowdrops or primroses in it, that wants the fresh beauty of the spring flowers. The fig-tree sends forth its new leaves under the influence of the sun. The trees and the flowers in the orbits of the seasons obey the heavens. The daisy follows

the sun all day in the sky, opens its eye when he rises, and closes its eye when he sets ; and this because the sun is the source of all its life and beauty. And so do you seek the things that are above, and be influenced in all the actions of your life by the powers of heaven. Follow the Sun of Righteousness whithersoever He goeth, that you may become more beautiful in His eyes, and have more abundant life. And so loving the Lord Jesus, and unfolding your life in His light and love, you will grow as the flowers grow ; you will do consciously and willingly what they do unconsciously and willessly. And knowing that when you come to fade like the flowers and leaves, you will fade into the fuller summer of the immortal life, you will be prepared for the death, come when it may, of which the poetess speaks:

"Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath,
And stars to set ; but all,
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death!"

Second Sight

"Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see."—2 KINGS vi. 17.

IN the Highlands of Scotland, the people used to believe in what is called "second sight." Some old persons were said to possess this power in a remarkable degree. They gave out that they saw things which other people could not see. Visions of future events appeared before their eyes with the utmost distinctness; distant friends were seen

engaged in the work which they happened to be doing at the time; and persons who were destined to die soon, although then in perfect health, presented a shadowy appearance to their view, with pale face and shrouded form. Science has banished in these days this old superstition, like the fairy tales, and we must now leave it to the uses of poetry.

But in the Bible we have a remarkable example of what may be truly called "second sight." We are told how the prophet Elisha knew the plans which the king of Syria formed in his own secret chamber for the invasion of the land of Israel, and revealed them to the king of Israel, who in consequence was prepared to defeat these plans at every point. Enraged at his purposes being thus always baffled, the king of Syria sent an army to Dothan to take the prophet alive and bring him into his presence. Dothan was a small village not far from Samaria, built upon the shoulder of a steep hill. The Syrians, knowing that they had a remarkable man to deal with, came to the foot of the hill under cover of the dark night,

and there encamped with the utmost quietness, meaning on the morrow to surround the hill with a living wall of soldiers, so that the prophet could not escape. The servant of Elisha, a young man, happened to rise early, and on going out he saw the first rays of the rising sun glittering upon the spears and swords of a great army standing in battle array around the hill. In great alarm he ran to the bedside of the sleeping prophet, and aroused him, that he might come and see the extraordinary sight and tell what was to be done.

Elisha heard the strange news very calmly. He said to the terror-stricken young man, "Fear not, for they that are with us are more than they that be with them." And, taking him up to the housetop, he prayed to the Lord that the eyes of the young man might be opened, and that he might see the heavenly sight which he saw, that so his fears might be removed. And immediately the young man looked round with "larger, other eyes;" and just below the village he saw a living circle of fortification between

him and the army of the Syrians at the foot of the hill, horses and chariots of fire. When he beheld the wonderful sight his fears completely vanished; and though he saw the Syrians coming up the hill and passing through the street till they surrounded Elisha's door, he was confident and unmoved. He knew that the Lord of Hosts would deliver his master and himself. His eyes were opened, and the peace of God in consequence kept, or, as it should be translated, *garrisoned* his heart.

There is a little weed that grows in our fields, with pretty white flowers, called Euphrasy or Eye-bright. It used to be said that if the juice of this plant were rubbed upon the eye, it enabled one to see the fairies and all the secrets of the invisible world. Milton represents the Archangel Michael as purging Adam's eyes from the film of sin with it, that he might see the wonderful sights of heaven. This is a superstition; but the Lord Jesus Himself counsels the blind church of Laodicea to buy of Him eye-salve, that it may be able to

see its evil state and the remedy for it. He counsels you to buy His wonderful eye-salve, which is just faith; and you can buy it without money and without price, for it is the gift of God. You will get it for the asking; and it will cure your blindness, and enable you to see what others do not see. You will have the pure heart that shall see God; and, like the guileless Nathaniel, you will see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon Jesus; and the sight will make you as bold and fearless as it made the young man of Dothan.

Balaam was called "the man whose eyes are open." He saw many things that others did not see, with amazing clearness; but with his eyes open he chose the wrong path from the right, and he came to an evil end. But you should seek to have the "open eyes" which Balaam had, that, unlike him, you may be able to walk more clearly and firmly in the righteous ways of the Lord. Most people go through the world with their eyes half shut. They do not see the glory and the wonder that are around them even in

the commonest things. They do not possess even what we may call first sight, much less second sight. They have no gift of clear and penetrating vision into the actual life that lies around us.

I should like you to be different from this ; to be able to look with open eye upon the wonders of creation, to see the splendour in the grass, and the glory in the flower. There are two harvests that are to be got from the fields, the harvest of food and clothing for your perishing bodies and the "harvest of a quiet eye," of beautiful thoughts and bright visions for your immortal souls. And in order to reap the latter and better harvest, you must cultivate the habit of noticing things. Seeing is one of the fine arts, which needs to be acquired and carefully educated. And remember that you will see beauty in Nature, just in proportion as you have fostered beauty in your eye by educating and refining it. You will gather grapes even from thorns and figs even from thistles. Even the weed will become a lily to you, or redden to a rose.

But I should like you to be able to see in Nature more than mere natural beauty and wonder, interesting and delightful and profitable as that is. I should like you to train yourselves to see God in everything, so that everything may witness to you of Him; so that you may see His face looking out upon you from every wayside flower, and His glory crowning every mountain-top, and His smile in every light and shade that flits across the fields.

Then there is His own precious Word, which He has given to you to be the light of your feet on the heavenward path. You would think that it is not necessary to have your eyes opened to see the horses and chariots of fire on the pages of this wonderful Book; for they seem to be as clear and transparent as the visions of the seven seals of Revelation, when the seals were broken. And yet there is no book that is so little understood, so often misread. Multitudes of people, old as well as young, read its sublime pages, as the apostle Paul says the Jews read the Old Testament, with a veil over their

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eyes. Many people read the Bible with the light of the natural eye only; and the effect is the same as to look at a sundial by moonlight instead of by daylight, when, of course, it cannot tell you the hour. When you open God's Word, then, you need that God should open your eyes and open your heart, that you may understand and receive its blessed truths; that you may see that the sin of which it speaks is in your own heart, and that the salvation to which it points is within your grasp; that you may see as in a glass the glory of Christ and be changed into the same image.

I should like you to know something of science; for it, too, is a wonderful second sight, correcting the mistakes, and taking away the deceptions of first sight. We commonly say that seeing is believing. But in reality the evidence of our senses is untrustworthy, unless it is verified by some other process. This is a world of illusions. Things are not what they seem. There is nothing more certain than that the sun moves every day across the sky; yet every educated person knows that it does not

so move at all. This, the most undeniable, self-evident fact that we know, is no fact at all, but an illusion. The earth seems to be fixed and still, and yet it revolves round the sun. It seems to be flat, and yet it is proved to be round. Matter seems to be solid and at rest, but it is shown to consist of countless atoms in perpetual motion. Even the hardest and most compact substance, such as a crystal, is made up of particles in ceaseless whirl, each with a space in which to revolve. Look at a diamond! Were the sensibility of our eyes increased a millionfold, we should see the myriads of molecules of which the gem is composed in violent motion; and the extreme hardness of the precious stone is just owing to the great rapidity of these motions. Our eyes looking through a pool of water see a pebble at the bottom of it, in the place where it is not; and the straightest stick put into it seems bent. The eyes of many persons are colour-blind, and they see the landscape different from other persons—the reds appearing to them as greens. And so it is throughout Nature. And here it is that science becomes

so useful. It shows to you by its magical second sight the open secrets of the natural world—the truth and the reality of things—and so corrects the deceptive appearance. And it is even more valuable in helping your faith by its analogies. By impressing upon your minds the conviction that the unseen is more important in all the objects and processes of your natural life than the seen, it induces you to set a right value upon the spiritual world, and to look in the matter of your salvation not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal. Death seems to end all, and there is nothing beyond; but even the science that creates this misgiving which haunts your hearts itself supplies the remedy, and justifies you, by its methods and analogies, to look behind and beyond the appearance of death to the great reality of eternal life which it conceals.

Let us all pray—for we all walk in a vain show—that our eyes may be opened, and that we may be able to keep them open, that we may see all that God has to show us, and

rejoice in the vision. All eyes will be open one day. We shall all stand face to face with the things unseen and eternal. We shall see Jesus as He is ; and the things of religion that seem to us now as dim as dreams, as vague as clouds, will be as real and substantial as the fact of our own living on the earth at the present moment. Death will open eyes that have long been closed to the spiritual and eternal world. Let us pray that when death comes—and it may come very soon—it will be white troops of angels waiting to take us home to glory after a life well spent here, that it will show to us.

And here and now, while the life of each one of you is surrounded with a great mystery of evil, principalities and powers of wickedness, sickness, sorrow, sin, misfortune, accidents of all kinds, death in various forms—an army far more terrible than the Syrian host which surrounded Dothan, an army that may soon march up your street, and surround your door, and come for your capture—I pray God that your eyes may be opened to see yourselves encompassed with a great mystery

of love, to see the bright angels to whom God hath given charge concerning you to keep you through faith unto salvation, and to make all unfavourable things to work together for your good. And if you possess this true second sight, you will be ever bold and strong in faith; you will fear no evil, knowing that greater is He that is with you than all that can be against you. This world will be to you the gate of heaven, with much of its glory shining through and illumining your path; and death when it comes will be a chariot of fire with horses of fire, to translate you from this dark world to where there will be always open vision, and all the hill of God will be continually encompassed with the host of heaven.

The Dandelion

"*He hath made everything beautiful in his time.*"—ECCLESIASTES iii 11.

EVERY season has its own special beauty, and at every time of the year there is something in Nature which specially attracts the eye and awakens interest. If a minister's addresses to his young people be truly words in season, he must take notice of these objects of attraction, at the time when God sends them to teach us their lesson before they are

hid from our eyes. The object in Nature which is most common and conspicuous everywhere in May is the dandelion. It is not like the daisy "a constellated flower that never sets," for it appears chiefly in early summer. In every waste piece of ground, and along the edge of the pavements in many of our streets, it is unfolding its sunny blossoms; and every time I pass by it seems to make its mute appeal to me, to say something about it ere its fleeting glory fades away. It fringes the road that leads to the church, and comes timidly up to the very door, where it peeps out of the chinks of the stone, if the careful hand has not weeded it out. Let me lift it over the threshold, and take it into God's House, that it may be an object-lesson to us; feeling the truth of the saying of an old Scotch lady, who used to bring a sprig of southernwood beside her Bible with her to church, that "Nothing should be upon God's Word but a flower."

Many people pass the dandelion by without heeding it at all; and others regard it with contempt as only a troublesome weed, which

spoils their gardens and makes their paths untidy, and must therefore be at once destroyed. But surely God did not form in vain this little miniature sun, which brings down so much of the radiance of the great sun beside our common ways. He must have had some wise and loving purpose in making it spring up year after year, as duly as May comes round, and almost forcing it upon our attention. He has not left Himself without a witness even where man is so busy with his own buying and selling that there seems no room or time for God's things The heavenly gold of the common weed growing beside his feet is meant, if only for a moment, to take away his thoughts from the engrossing pursuit of earthly gold, and to bring him back to the simple bosom of Nature on which he lay when he was a child, and therefore nearer to the heart of God.

There is a beautiful French story of a nobleman who was imprisoned in a dreary fortress because he conspired against the rising power of Napoleon Buonaparte. During his lonely captivity, a little wild-flower grew

up between two of the paving-stones in his prison court. As he had nothing else to do or think of, it attracted his attention. He grew more and more interested in watching its growth, and many tender thoughts and memories grew around it. It showed him how many beautiful things he had missed in life which were there ready for him, if he had only known and cared. With touching fondness he called it Picciola, his little pet. He was lying very ill one day when his jailer told him that the object of his interest had put forth a flower. The prisoner immediately rose from his bed and went to see this surprising thing. He was lost in admiration of its beauty and fragrance; and from that moment a new life came not only to his body but also to his soul. For the wonderful thought sprang up in his mind that God had sent the flower to be a divine teacher to him, and to tell him of the great love that was in the Redeemer's heart even for the guiltiest sinner. Before that he had been a cold, sad-hearted sceptic, who had no God and no hopes beyond this world; but now life

acquired a new meaning and purpose to him, and he determined to consecrate it to the glory of God.

The little flower grew thicker and bigger till the chink between the two paving-stones became too strait for it, and it was beginning to droop and languish. The prisoner, seing this, sent a secret petition to the Emperor by the hands of the daughter of the jailer, beseeching to have the paving-stones that threatened the life of his pet removed, so that it might have room to expand. The young lady presented the petition to the Empress Josephine, who was so touched by it that she interceded herself for the liberty of the captive, and was successful. The Count, released from prison, married the young lady ; and long afterwards, when he died, his widow wore upon her breast a costly brooch, in which were set the faded remains of the little prison-flower that had done so much for the soul and body of her honoured husband. Thus you see how important a little weed springing up from such an unpromising soil had been.

And cannot the dandelion, springing up in the May-time of the year in the crevices of the pavements of our town, give the older ones among you, as you pass by, often it may be feeling imprisoned within narrow cares and worries, and longing for freedom and enlargement, thoughts of God as bright and cheering as the Picciola gave to the French Count in his prison ?

I remember in my school-days, spent in a remote country village, the boys and girls at this season of the year were fond of playing at what they called "making pictures," a custom that has now disappeared entirely. They would take a double daffodil, or a double red daisy, and put a piece of glass over the specimen and cover the whole with white paper. In the front they cut out a small square flap of the paper, and when they opened this little window, you saw a tiny picture of the daisy or the daffodil through the glass, which seemed to look much prettier when seen in this peep-show than it did when you saw it growing out in the garden-border. It seemed to receive new

beauty and to acquire new value to us youngsters by being thus framed and glazed and made into a picture, and we gladly paid the price of a pin or a button to get a look at it. Now, I want to treat the dandelion in the same fashion, and to show you what strange and beautiful things there are in it; and I hope you will prize it more when you thus see it through a new medium, and not say, when I have shown it to you, that the sight was not worth a pin. I want to make a picture of the dandelion, to teach you what the American poet, Russell Lowell, beautifully calls "the secret of a weed's plain heart."

The golden head of the dandelion is not what you would fancy it to be at first sight, a single flower. It is what is called a composite flower, made up of a great many little flowers of the same kind, forming a cluster or bouquet. Each of these separate florets, when you examine it by a magnifying-glass, is as perfect as if it were the only one. It has all the parts for producing seed, just as you see in the wild rose or lily. The dandelion produces so many flowers in one

head, in order that it may present a bright showy appearance, and so attract insects, which delight in brilliant colours, to feed upon the small particles of honey which they find at the bottom of each tiny flower-cup, and to carry with the least expenditure of time and trouble the pollen or fertilising powder from one to another, that seeds may be formed. When the sun is shining, the flowers of the dandelion unfold themselves in his warm rays in all their splendour, and look like little suns themselves, and then they are visited by the insects. But when there is rain, or when the evening comes, the dandelion shuts up its flowers to protect their honey from being washed away by the showers or the dews. And as no insects are abroad at such times, the honey is by this wise plan preserved for their use afterwards. That is the reason why flowers close up and go to sleep as it is called. The dandelion usually opens between six and seven o'clock in the morning, and closes about the same time in the evening. And this opening and closing of the flowers has always some rela-

tion or other to the necessity of guarding the honey in them from the rain or the dew, or the too great heat of the sun, so that by it insects may be tempted to visit them, and help in forming the seeds.

You have noticed that after a while the golden flowers of the dandelion disappear. The stalks that bore them, which before were upright when the flowers were expanded, lower themselves and lie close to the ground for about twelve days, while the seeds are ripening. When the seeds are mature they rise up straight again; and in place of the golden blossoms you see round fluffy balls, exceedingly delicate and ghost-like. The poet would say that the sun of the golden blossoms had set, and in its stead the pale round moon of the feathery seeds was taking up the wondrous tale. From every ripe seed springs a stalk crowned with a star of down of the most delicate texture, formed out of the rudiments of the ruff or calyx at the back of each flower. A breath is sufficient for its dispersion, and, carried along by the winds of heaven, the seed furnished with this

strange balloon is scattered abroad over the earth. In wet weather the stalks bearing the downy heads contract and cower down among the leaves, seeking protection from them. In fine weather they rise to their full height; and this is a beautiful provision to secure the dispersion of the seed only on dry days, when their feathery wings can float them freely upon every breeze. You have often, I am sure, gathered the ripe stalk of the dandelion, and blown away the downy seeds with your breath to find out by those that were left behind the hour of day, as the poet says :

> " Dandelion, with globe of down,
> The schoolboy's clock in every town,
> Which the truant puffs amain,
> To conjure lost hours back again."

Some of you, too, I daresay, continue the old custom of splitting the hollow column of the stem at the top into four parts, and rolling them into pale green curls, more beautiful in your eyes than the volutes of Ionic pillars. And the girls will still adorn their hair with

these graceful curls, or make chains of dandelion-beads for their necks, by cutting the hollow stems into little round bits.

You notice further that the flower of the dandelion crowns a tall naked stem, holding it up to the sun, while all the leaves form a rosette at the bottom. The plant at once sends its blossom straight up from its root, because the blossom is the most important part of it. It is this which forms the seed, upon which the spreading of the plant and the life of the race depend. The life of the dandelion, I need not tell you, is in great danger from the kind of situations in which it loves to grow, where it is exposed to continual accidents, and man himself is always destroying it. The very first thing, therefore, that the plant does is to form its flower and seed, so that the future race may be secure whatever becomes of the individual plant ; and then it proceeds more leisurely to expand and mature its leaves, which are for its own welfare, and which become more luxuriant when the seed is ripened and shed.

Besides this protection from danger, Nature has given to it another in the bitterness of its stem and leaves. These are full of a disagreeable milky juice, which prevents most animals from eating them. Then, too, there is the thick, long, carrot-like root which goes far down into the ground, and takes such a firm hold of it that it is difficult to pull it up entire. This root fixes it so that it cannot be easily moved, and furnishes it with a store of nourishment sufficient to make it last over the drought of summer and the frost of winter, and all the unfavourable conditions of the weather, until a suitable time comes for it to put forth its leaves and blossoms. This root also contains a bitter principle, which is used as a valuable medicine by doctors, but which most creatures dislike so much that they will not touch it. All these numerous precautions against the dandelion becoming extinct; all these wonderful means for forming and ripening and spreading its seed, are surely most remarkable proofs of God's care for this lowly weed, and of the importance which He attaches to it. When

we think of them they should teach us to value it too, and to try to find out what are the wise lessons for the sake of teaching which to us God is so carefully preserving it, and making it come up before us year after year as duly as April and May come round.

How did the dandelion come to be what it is? This is a new question which modern science teaches us to ask. Until a short time ago everybody took it for granted that a dandelion was always a dandelion; had been created what it is now, and had never changed since its creation. But a newer and truer view of Nature has taught us that it has a long history of its own. That history leads us through a series of changes as wonderful as that which the classic fables tell us the beautiful girl Daphne underwent when she was changed into a laurel-bush, or the youth Narcissus, when he was transformed, through constant gazing at his own image in a stream, into a lily. The dandelion has been slowly moulded into its present shape by the force of circumstances. You can trace up its history from

the simple form of its first flowers, arranged at intervals along the stalk, to the existing composite form of all its flowers, coiled and compressed into one general head; and it bears in its blossoms the traces of its earlier stages. Have you ever noticed the little teeth, like those of a fine saw, at the end of the yellow strap-shaped petals which have given the flower the name of dandelion — a French word meaning the teeth of a lion? These teeth are always five in number; and they tell us that each of these strap-shaped yellow leaves was once a round flower of five petals, like a wild rose or a wild apple blossom. The teeth indicate the divisions of the old parts of the flower. It is those curious birth-marks and relics of old states left behind in its advancing stages, and still preserved in the plant, which invest the meanest weed with a fresh and endless interest.

The dandelion belongs to the largest, oldest, and most widely diffused order of plants. While other orders of plants have died out and become mere fossil remains

in the rocks, this order has survived the geological changes of many different periods, on account of its power of adapting itself to those changes. And these changes, in their turn, have only made it better suited for all the varied soils and climates of the earth at the present day. We find members of this order in every part of the globe, in places as far apart from each other as they can be. It is the prevailing and dominant order of vegetable life, the most highly finished, and the most entirely successful family of plants. And the dandelion is one of the most perfect forms belonging to it. It is the head and crown of the vegetable kingdom, as man is the head and crown of the animal creation. And it is curious how this highest type of plant always is found only where man, the highest type of animal life, is found, and where he dwells or cultivates the soil. It is never found apart from him; it follows him wherever he goes —to America, Australia, and New Zealand; and there in the new home it becomes a silent but eloquent reminder of the dear old land he may never see again.

We are so accustomed, as I have said, to look upon the dandelion as a mean, insignificant weed which we pass by heedlessly, or trample under foot, or root out remorselessly from our gardens and streets, that it seems very strange to hear it described by all naturalists as a far higher type of plant-life than a rose or a lily, than even a cedar, an oak, or a palm. Its flowers are more perfectly formed, and its type of structure is more highly organised than these beautiful flowers and magnificent trees. It has a pedigree that goes farther back into the mysterious past than them all; it has got the latest improvements in floral structure, as one might say, and is the newest and freshest of all God's works; that on which He has been working, from the first simple beginning of flowers on the earth until now, to achieve the highest perfection of flower-life. Think of the honour which God has thus bestowed upon a humble wayside weed! Truly He exalts the lowly and gives more abundant honour to that which seems most to lack it!

It is subjects like this that give us higher

and truer ideas of God's wisdom and love, and enable us to understand the full significance of our Saviour's words, when He bade us consider the lilies, how they grow; not merely look at them for a moment, and admire them superficially, but sit down before them and study them deeply, and try to find out what they mean. It is these parables of Nature that enable us to understand the mysteries of grace. One of the commonest objections to the doctrine of salvation is that it is too high, too grand to be true; that it is an ideal or transcendental thing. Those who look up to the heavens, and consider the myriads of stars and the vastness of the universe, can hardly believe that the Great Being who made and upholds all these worlds, could condescend to dwell upon our little planet, and assume the nature of creatures like us, and suffer and die in our room. But when you consider how wonderfully God has formed the common wayside weed, and watches over it, and guards it on every side against being destroyed, you will begin to understand how the same God

should think it worth His while to save the creatures made in His own image by the sacrifice of His own Son. The same Hand that ministers to the humble needs of the dandelion, ministers to your immortal wants.

It is told of Luther that, during his great controversy with Eck, the learned and formidable champion of the Roman Catholic Church, he had a bunch of flowers in his hand, which he kept smelling at, while his adversary was launching his fiercest arguments and denunciations against him. He got calmness and confidence and sweet thoughts of God and of heavenly things, from these simple flowers. And so while engaged in controversy with scientific unbelief, the best source of comfort and encouragement—that which brings God nearest to you, and makes all His ways in providence and grace real and true to you—is, next to the study of His own Word, the study of the humble wild flowers which He has made to grow beside your path. The faith of every one of you may be greatly confirmed and cheered in these days of doubt and unbelief, and universal ques-

tioning of all things in heaven and earth, by the study of God's dealings with a common dandelion ; trying to find out for yourselves how beautiful He has made this thing in its season.

The Morning Star

"*And I will give him the morning star.*"
REVELATION ii. 28.

WHEN I was at Constantinople, I went to see the English burial-ground at Scutari, on the opposite or Asiatic side of the narrow strait. There is no lovelier cemetery in the world than that, and it commands a glorious view. It is surrounded by high walls, and is admirably kept—the ground being covered with the smoothest and greenest turf, and

shaded with cypresses and pine-trees. In the centre is a tall granite monument, erected by our gracious Queen. Around it are many graves of those who fell in battle, or died afterwards of their wounds during the Crimean War. The dead were mostly young men, who were cut off in the bloom and vigour of life; and here and there you see the record on the marble tombstone of the devoted life and the earnest Christian faith of the sleeper below. No one could read these inscriptions, and know from them of the great sorrow caused to some fond wife or mother by the loss of the beloved dead, without being deeply moved.

There was one thing that touched me greatly, and that was the appearance on the graves of a little lily-like flower, called the Star of Bethlehem. It grows in the southern parts of our own country, and is thus a link of connection between this far-away burying-ground and the green fields of England where the sleepers used to play as boys. It grew in myriads over the green mounds, and opened its pure white starry rays to the sunbeams of April, that shone brightly upon them. The flowers

almost hid the grass, they were so numerous ; and they looked as if they had newly fallen from the sky, instead of growing up through the dark soil—they were so pure and bright. With the utmost impartiality they covered the grave of officer and private soldier, and seemed especially to distinguish the last resting-places of the unknown and unnamed dead, over whom there was no monument.

This starry flower spoke to me, in a most impressive way, of the morning star of the resurrection, which is promised to him that overcometh. This little earth-star bloomed over the graves of the English soldiers, in token that for them there was a star of hope in the heavenly sky that would usher in the eternal day, when the sleepers would awake to newness of life. That earth-star itself rose from the death of Nature in winter, under the quickening influences of Spring ; and so those who were planted in that God's acre in the likeness of Christ's death, would be planted together in the likeness of His resurrection. Over the whole burial-place was the holy light of self-sacrifice ; for each one that slept in it over-

came the selfishness of human nature, and counted not his life dear to him for the sake of his country.

Each of you is a soldier. You have to fight the good fight of faith. You have to struggle with your own besetting sins, and with the evils of the world. And, if you overcome, the promise of the morning star is given to you. That promise is not meant to mock you with a false hope. The morning star is not so high above you that you cannot attain to it. Infants cry for the moon when they see it as a shining shield in the sky, attracted by its beauty. They stretch out their little hands; and it is only by degrees, as they grow older, that they find out that they can never reach it. I have seen a heraldic symbol of an ancient house, consisting of a fountain sending up its waters to a great height, and then falling down to the earth, with a star shining a few inches above the highest point reached by the water. This symbol was meant to teach the lesson that human ambition and effort were like that fountain. It was limited; it could send its

water up to a certain height. The law of gravitation was against it. It must fall from that height to the earth, while the star shone calm and clear in the blue sky above it—mocking its efforts. But that heraldic symbol will never be inscribed on the shield of him that overcometh in the good fight of faith. That which he desires and attempts in God's name, and for God's glory, he can attain. If he will overcome himself he will overcome heaven. His faith and endeavour will reach up to the morning star, and he will obtain it as his reward.

Now, what is meant by this morning star? In the first place it is the emblem of royalty. It is linked with the sceptre. When a general returns as a conqueror from some great war, he gets from his sovereign a decoration made in the shape of a golden and jewelled star which he wears upon his breast. Each order of knighthood has a golden and jewelled star connected with it, and every one who receives it feels proud of it in the highest degree. It exalts him above his fellows. And so God gives to each conqueror in the spiritual war-

fare the jewelled star of honour. If you overcome in the strife with temptation and evil, you will be decorated with a star that shines brighter than any jewel, and you will have the sceptre of dominion over self and the world. The star that arose out of Jacob will crown you with glory and honour. That fair white orb whose "dew-drop of light trembles on the front of dawn," will sparkle on your brow; and all who see you will know that by God's grace you have conquered the world, the flesh, and the devil.

But there is more than the idea of royal power and honour in the symbol of the morning star. It means the brightness and freshness of youth. The day star is one of the most beautiful objects in Nature. It is lovely in itself, and it is connected with all lovely things. Have you got up very early some morning in summer, when Venus or the morning star was shining in the sky; and have you not felt then how fresh and fair everything was? It seemed as if you were in the midst of a new creation of God altogether, instead of in an old world of sin and

sorrow and care. The dew sparkled on the grass; the air felt so sweet and pure; and the sky bent down to the earth with such radiant beauty. I remember the morning we left Nazareth, when the sun was just rising, how deliciously cool it was; how the mountain breeze softly fanned our cheeks, and put new energy into our frames, and made us feel so exhilarated in our spirits that mere living itself was a joy. The grass shone like spears of emerald in the sunshine; and great, thick snowy-white spiders' webs lay on the ground, glistening with the dew, like fleecy flecks that had dropped from new-born lambs; while the far-off mountains had a purple bloom on them, and the snowy crest of Hermon seemed like a great white throne in the heavens, and the eastern horizon was radiant with crimson and golden splendours. The morning star was fading away into the pale sunlit blue of the sky. To live always amid such delicious brightness and freshness, seemed almost too good for earth. And it is something like that feeling which Christ promises to the victor over his sins and temptations, when He

promises to give him the morning star and all that it implies. You know that it is sin that takes away the bloom and freshness of life. It is not the mere lapse of the years that makes persons old, but the cares and the passions and the troubles that the evil of sin always brings with it. And the more you are able to overcome those things that age you, the more do you preserve your energy and freshness, and make your life always young.

The Wise Men of the East were led by a star to the cradle of Jesus. And so the morning star will always lead you to the cradle of a child. It will always stand over where the young child is. Jesus unites the star and the child in Himself. He is the star that leads you to Himself. He consecrates the symbol by making it a type of His own eternal youth and freshness—"I am the bright and morning star." He appears to you as bright and lustrous to-day as when He shone before the eyes of Abraham. He is the holy child Jesus to you as He was to the apostles. He has the dewy freshness and brightness of the everlasting morning always about Him.

And because He is thus the morning star, He keeps all things fresh and new, age after age and year after year. He makes each morning still to rise out of the bosom of night, with the same dewy sweetness about it that it had in the first morning of creation. He makes the spring as green now as the springs of long ago. He brings back the flowers each summer, in the same bright beauty that they had when we first saw them. Every season He who is the morning star renews the face of the earth, and brings back to each child of man the glory of Eden. We see in the succession of the seasons, and in the revolution of the stars, the proof that the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary.

And if it is through His everlasting youth that heaven and earth abide young, and all things are made continually new, how much more will He renew you who are made in His own image and redeemed with His own blood. If you yield up to Him your life when it is fairest, He will preserve its beauty and freshness for you. If you give

it to the service of the world, you will soon lose the brightness of your spirits and the youthfulness of your hearts; you will have the cares and the fears and the sorrows that make life weary and sad. But God's love and Christ's grace bring no wrinkles to the brow and no weariness to the heart. The truths and experiences of the religion of Jesus belong to the kingdom which, amid all the changes of the world, cannot be moved; and therefore the soul that has them, and is moulded by their power, partakes of their unchanging freshness. Your life spent with Him who keeps the sun ever bright and the sky ever new, and the angels ever young and fair, will never change or fade. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

The evening star is always the morning star. The bright orb that shines at sunset is the same that shines at sunrise. It disappeared at the close of day, to reappear at the beginning of a new day. And so all that you loved and lost under the evening star,

will come back to you under the morning star, fairer and dearer than ever. However old, you will leave the world younger than when you entered it. The day of your death will be better than the day of your birth; and heaven for you will be the restitution of all things.

Footprints in the Snow

"*They shall walk with me in white.*"
REVELATION iii. 4.

OUR little bits of back garden in town often present a strange sight in winter time. The old familiar earth is concealed, and a strange covering of snow meets the unaccustomed eye. On this smooth, white surface, if you look out from your window upon it in the early morning, you will, perhaps, see the marks of creatures that have

passed over it since the dawn of day, footprints of birds and cats especially. This is an interesting study. It is like trying to find out the meaning of the strange characters stamped on the bricks of Egypt and Babylon.

But the best place to carry out this study is in the fields of pure white, stainless snow around an old farmhouse in the country. There God has wiped out the ordinary marks of Nature, as a child cleans a slate of the figures of an old sum wrought on it, to work out a new sum, and thus provided a spotless, unwritten page on which new marks may be inscribed. And no white page of any storybook is so full of things that excite curiosity. Early as you go out to these fields, you will find that a great many creatures have gone there earlier than you, whose traces betray them as plainly as if you had seen them passing. Each creature leaves a distinct mark on the snow by which you can identify it. Those broad marks, fringed with the print of long claws, tell you that a fox has come this way, and has been trying to get at the hen-

roost. These other are the tracks of a hare, easily made out by the fact that it only makes three impressions, for the two forefeet come down so close together that they leave only one print. Here, under the hedge, are tiny lines left by the feet and tail of a mouse that has come out of the back-yard. And yonder are the rounded marks of the wild dove's cushioned feet, and the spreading three prongs formed by the great claws of the rook. Everywhere you see the marks of the busy feet of hungry starlings, robins, and finches that have been trying to scrape away the snow, and get at some food in the ground beneath. All these footprints on the snow the lover of Nature has learned to read as easily as you read the printed characters of a book. It is the snow that has revealed such clear and distinct traces of the ways and habits of birds and beasts. On the common brown soil it might not be so easy to distinguish the marks they had left behind.

And is not the lesson which this Nature-picture teaches you very plain? The religious or spiritual world is a world of purity, where

nothing that defileth ought to enter. And the goodness of this pure world, compared with the goodness of the ordinary world, is like a piece of the whitest linen cloth ever made by man, which looks dingy and yellow when put beside a patch of new-fallen snow. Those who dwell in this land walk in white, and are dressed in the fashion of God's family, which is spotless white. The young communicants in the early Church were called candidates—that is, persons clothed in white —for they were literally clothed in white, so that their long garments might be a sermon to them. Now, in this white world of religion things are conspicuous that would not have been noticed in the dark world of ordinary life ; just as you notice footprints in the snow, which you would never have noticed on the brown earth. A religious profession renders the walk and conversation of the person who makes it very clear and distinct. It produces marks in the pure white element of righteousness, in which he professes to live and move, that are known and read of all men. It brings his character and conduct

clearly and prominently into the light, that his deeds may be made manifest. He is surrounded by observers, who are on the watch, not to notice the many good steps he takes, but to mark the least halting. Professors of religion are professing to walk with Christ in white; and, therefore, the world can judge whether they are Christ's disciples, as unmistakably as a naturalist can tell the particular creature that has left behind a special mark in the snow. Nothing shows the least stain so clearly as the white robe; nothing reveals the least defilement like the white path. And did professors of religion sufficiently consider how many eyes are upon them, and the effects that may result from their inspection, they would surely pray with David: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord; and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies;" or, as it is in the margin, "because of them that observe me."

Now, when you enter upon the path of religion—and I trust that many of you have already entered upon it—you must remember that it is walking with Christ in white, walking as it

were upon new-fallen snow, and making in its pure substance your own characteristic track. The purity of the path will reveal the nature of your footprints; and every one will know how to classify you. You see the character of the saints of Sardis, from the nature of the footprints they have left behind in the Word of God, as they walked with Christ in white. You know what kind of men and women they were; how they failed and how they succeeded in their life-walk. And so the world will take knowledge of you when you are walking with Christ in white, what kind of footprints you are leaving on the snow of God's world of righteousness and holiness.

The footprints in the snow, though they are very distinct, are very evanescent. They disappear with the melting of the snow. On the margin of a little bay of Loch-an-Eilan, at the foot of the Cairngorm Hills, there is a charming beach of the purest and whitest sand. This sand is formed of granite particles ground very fine by the constant ripple of the wavelets, and has a smooth, hard surface. Before leaving this beautiful spot

where we spent our August holidays, my wife and I wandered down to this beach, and wrote our names and left our footprints on the tempting surface of the sand. But we had a sad feeling in doing this, for we knew well that in the course of a few days these memorials of our presence would be completely obliterated by the action of the winds and waves, and all around would be as though we had never been there. And if the footprints you are making in God's pure world were as fleeting as these, you might not need to concern yourselves much about the nature of them. But they are enduring as your own nature, enduring as God's Word and God's righteousness. We see in the hard slabs of the sandstone quarry the footprints of birds and reptiles, that passed over the sandy shores of seas which vanished millions of years ago; and from these footprints the naturalist can tell you the shape and size and nature of those long extinct creatures, though nothing is left of them but these fossil tracks in the sandstone. And so every one is leaving footprints on the sands of

time, to be hardened into enduring fossils and to be deciphered long after they have passed away. We know, as I have said, the nature of the Christian walk and conversation of the saints in Sardis, from the footprints they have left behind in God's Word, as they walked with Christ in white. Everything else about them has perished; but those footprints make them real and living among us once more. And so, as you walk with Christ, your Christian walk will testify of you, when nothing else of you remains in the living world.

How necessary, then, when your path is traced, as it were, in a substance as white and soft as snow, so that it can be easily made out, and yet which hardens into the endurance of adamant, that you should carefully consider what kind of steps you are making. If at any time you turn aside into the miry ways of sin, when you come back to the pure snow of the right path, you bring the stains of these miry ways to defile its purity; and your footsteps for a long distance can be traced by their brown muddy prints, and it

will be a long time before the mud passes off, and you make clean footprints in the snow once more. How would you like these muddy footprints, that have disfigured a large part of the fair track of your life, to be made permanent, so that you could not look back upon your path of life without seeing them, and being grieved at what cannot be forgotten or obliterated? It is true that the blood of Jesus Christ makes even crimson and scarlet stains white as snow; and the righteousness of Christ can justify the most ungodly. But even forgiven sins are painful to remember; and healed backslidings leave a scar of abiding regret behind. Better far to walk with Christ in white continually, and so leave marks, that, if they are lasting, will be pure as the snow all the way.

Your path through life lies across the untrodden snow. No one has gone this way heretofore. Ask—each of you—Jesus to take you by the hand, as you walk with Him in the white of a soul that trusts only in His righteousness and that loves His law, to make your way clean before you, and to enable you

to keep it clean, and to leave such clear, distinct, characteristic footprints of godliness on it that others may walk in your traces, and be followers of you, as you are a follower of the Lord Jesus. And so your way now, and throughout all your life, will be ever upwards and onwards—the shining path of the just—to where the white-robed multitude stand around the great white Throne, on the sea of glass, pure and calm and steadfast for

Life a Light

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—MATTHEW v. 16.

You have often, I daresay, when rowing in a boat on one of our salt-water lochs on a calm moonless night, seen your oars striking wonderful flashes of light out of the dark waters. And some of you have perhaps sailed over the wide sea at night, and have noticed that the waves which the ship made as it ploughed the waters, were crested with a

gleam of light, which shone with a strange weird radiance, putting you in mind of the "sea of glass mingled with fire" mentioned in the book of Revelation. If you take up a quantity of this illuminated water, and examine a drop or two of it under the microscope, you will find that it is full of minute organisms, with a very simple structure.

Besides these sea-creatures, you know there are many others found on dry land, which possess the power of giving out light. There is the glow-worm, a little insect without wings, which creeps among the dry moss and grass on our wayside banks on quiet summer evenings, and sheds a mild greenish light about it, which is very beautiful and fairy-like. And there are the fireflies of the tropics, that dance up and down in the air like winged sparks, and light up the green foliage of the trees with a wonderful splendour. I have had some of them sent to me in a box from the south of Europe, and I kept them several days alive. At night I let them out, and they flew about the room, and made little

circles of light in the darkness with their pulses of flame. When a boy I used to put several glow-worms in a tiny wicker-cage, and read my books by the help of their light.

But it is not animals alone that have this strange power of producing light from their bodies; some plants possess it as well. There were rumours at Simla in the Himalayas, on one occasion, that the mountains were illuminated every night by some magical herb; and this was found to arise from a species of white flower growing on the hills in great abundance, and producing a strange light. I have seen the common marigold becoming luminous after a week of very dry weather, when a golden light appeared to play from petal to petal. The evening-primrose, the scarlet poppy, the sunflower and the Indian cress, all have the power of surrounding themselves with flashes of light, like summer lightning in miniature; and even in mosses and mushrooms I have often seen the same curious property of giving forth an appearance of light.

Now what is this light which these living

plants and animals produce? It is just their life making itself manifest. The radiance which they display is owing to the intense activity of their vital powers. They glow like the axle of a wheel that gets red-hot by the rapidity of its movements. Science tells you, as an elementary fact, that one force of Nature can be changed into another force. Supposing you fire at a target, when the bullet hits the mark its motion is changed into heat. Out of that heat you get electricity, and out of electricity you get light. So is it with life and living structures. The activity of a living creature's vital powers produces heat, and that heat when raised to a certain point, and in particular circumstances, can produce light. A certain portion of nerve-force is changed into light. It is only when the powers of the animal and plant are at their height that this remarkable light is shed by them. At other times they are dull and dark. The glow-worm lights its tiny lamp, and the firefly becomes a living flame, only when they mate; and the plant shines in the dark only when it puts forth a strong

effort in flowering. And the same is true of the creatures in the sea; they are luminous only when they are exerting their highest activity. Life kindles in them into a flame which the waters cannot quench.

We find that this is so even in the case of man himself. There are times when life in him too becomes luminous by its own intensity. When Moses had his life quickened to its highest point by communion with God within the cloud on the top of Sinai, his face shone with the glory, so that the people could not look upon it. When Stephen was put to death for his Christian faith, he saw the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and his soul was so filled with rapture that it irradiated his countenance, and the bystanders, looking upon him, saw his face as if it were the face of an angel. And we are told that when our Lord talked about His death with Moses and Elias on the Mount of Transfiguration, and thus was raised into a perfect transport of self-sacrifice, not only did His face shine, but His very clothes gave forth a radiance intensely white and dazzling.

These were remarkable examples of what we see not infrequently in a less striking form in our every-day life. You see homely countenances lighting up with a wonderful beauty, when some kind and loving feeling fills their hearts. What can be brighter than the smile upon the face of the mother, as she fondly gazes upon the little child in her arms? What can be lovelier than the look which transfigures some friend, who has shown to you his nobler self in some brave, self-sacrificing deed? I have seen a heavenly beauty stealing over a dying face, in the midst of keen anguish patiently borne, because of the thought of the joy set before it. It seemed as if the husk of the fleshly body had become transparent, allowing the soul, illumined by its faith and hope, to shine through, and give it its highest expression.

It was a true instinct that led the painters of old to put a halo of light around the saints in their pictures. This cloud of glory, in the midst of which they were seen, was supposed to come from their own persons. When it was limited to the head, it was called a nimbus ;

when it enveloped the whole body it was an aureole. The apostles, martyrs, and confessors were painted with a golden halo, the prophets and patriarchs with a silver halo, and the saints with a red halo. Living saints were painted with a square halo, and those who were dead with a round one. In this way the artists strove to give sensible expression to the great and noble qualities which these sacred persons possessed, and which glorified their faces and shone in their bodily forms; so that, seeing their halos, you can recognise at once what was their special claim to reverence, and whether, at the time they were painted, they were living or had passed to their reward in heaven.

And though you do not actually see with your bodily eyes the faces and forms of good people illumined with such a halo, you do see, with the eye of your soul, the glory of their goodness shining around them and transfiguring them. You have seen the eyes of persons flashing with anger; have you not also seen them beaming with love? Evil passions are called fiery passions, because they consume

the soul and cause it to flame with a wild excitement; and the Apostle speaks of the tongue being set on fire with the curse of hell. And if evil passions can thus strike a lurid light from them, how much more can good feelings create around them a halo of bright and beautiful radiance.

It is possible for persons to make their faces shine with the inner light of the soul; to raise their spiritual life to such a pitch of rapture by prayer and meditation, that it may glow and shine in their very look. It is told of St. Columba that on one occasion, while living in a rude stone hut on an island near Mull, he was raised into a rapt, ecstatic state, like John in Patmos, and for three days and nights he neither ate nor drank, nor suffered any one to approach him. The hut was filled with heavenly light, and through the chinks of the door and walls, rays of surpassing brightness were seen to issue during the night. This luminous appearance of the great saint was, no doubt, greatly exaggerated by superstition, but there was in all probability an element of truth in it. If a plant or a jelly-

fish can give forth light when its life is highly stimulated at a particular season, I do not see any difficulty in believing that a saint's face, in a highly rapturous spiritual state, might shine like the face of Moses and the face of Christ. There was such an ecstatic look upon the countenance of St. Columba, that it seemed to the spectators to be not only glowing with light, but radiating it around in the darkness. It is only what we might expect. People naturally looked for the holiness of a saint to manifest itself in such a radiance in his look and appearance ; and they could not think of him without seeing him in their fancy's eye in the light shed like a halo around him by his own virtues.

It is reflected light only that any human being can exhibit. Christ alone is a sun, a central orb who has light in Himself, and in whom is no darkness at all. All who love and serve Him borrow His light, as the moon borrows the light of the sun, and reflects it to others. From the True Light you get your light, and you diffuse it around. The light and heat in your household fire are

imprisoned sunshine, long ages ago stored up in wood and coal, and now let loose to assume their original form when you burn your fuel in the grate. And so the light and heat which you give out in your Christian life have been worked in you by the Sun of Righteousness, and you can only shine with the power which the Saviour has given you. You know how light quickens life; how flowers and trees grow brighter and more luxuriant in the strong sunshine. The more light a plant or animal absorbs, the more vigorous and beautiful it is. And as light is thus the source of life, so life in its turn becomes the source of light—gives out the light it has received. Christ's life was the light of men ; and so should your life be. You should seek to have His life in you, in such vigorous fulness, that it will become a light to illumine through you the darkness of the world.

Christ wants you each to be not a lamp but a light ; not merely a light-bearer, diffusing light to others while you yourself are in darkness, but a light-giver, radiating out light like the glow-worm and the firefly, as a living

process, as the highest exercise of your spiritual vitality. Your life is to be a transparent lantern, making the light within shine in outward forms of goodness. And as you have seen the pattern of the beautiful stained-glass in a lantern coming out brightly when illumined by the candle, so the light of God's truth and love, which He has kindled in your soul, should make the pattern of your character and conduct come out with clearest brightness, so that all may see it. The light that Christ has given you may be a very little light, obscure and unnoticed as the flame of a fireside lamp or of a glow-worm on the mossy bank by the wayside, without anything to draw to it the observation and applause of the great world. But however tiny, let it be true and sincere. Let it shine in its own place and in its own proper light; shining so that your friends and companions may understand Christ better by its rays. I told you how I used sometimes to read a book by the light of a glow-worm. Does your life shed light upon God's Word, and enable others to see its full force and divine meaning? There

is no life so humble that, if it be true to Christ, it may not hope to shed some of His light. In Nature it is only creatures of the simplest structure that are luminous. The more complicated organisation of creatures higher in the scale of life diminishes the power of luminosity ; and so the more humble and simple the Christian life is, the more of Christ's light can it radiate, for there is little or nothing of self to obstruct or obscure it !

There is a charming story, told by a Danish author, of a woman who was once brought out of sore difficulties by means of a little firefly. She was left a widow with one child; and all that she possessed was a small cottage and a garden. Her husband had borrowed money from his master, a neighbouring farmer, with which to build the cottage and stock the garden; and when he died of a fever that raged in the place, he had paid back all that he owed, with the exception of a small sum. The farmer died of the same fever, and his heir finding the bond for the cottage among his father's papers, and know-

ing nothing of the payments that had been made, demanded the whole sum from the widow. Unfortunately she could produce no proof of her husband's payments, for the book in which they had been put down was somehow lost and could not be found; and there was nothing for it but that the cottage should be sold to pay her debt. She was in great distress, and the night before the sale she prayed earnestly that some way of escape might be opened up. When her prayer was ended, a firefly came into the room through the open window, and hovered about. The little boy chased the glittering object with great eagerness, and it escaped behind a big chest that stood against the wall. There it shone down on the floor in the narrow space. The boy could see its tiny flame, but he could not get at it, and besought his mother to remove the chest out of the way. She did so, and something that was between the chest and the wall tumbled to the ground with a noise. She picked it up, and to her great joy found it was the book in which her husband's payments were put down, and the

receipts for the money drawn up in perfect order in his master's handwriting.

The grateful widow felt that it was the Lord's doing. While she was praying the little brilliant fly came in, and by its light pointed to the very place where the means of her deliverance was concealed. And may not your light point the way for greater deliverances and richer treasures for those who are poor and needy? May not your good works shine with equal usefulness in enabling lost souls to find themselves, reviving the faith of those who are drooping, comforting those who are sad, and in relieving those who are ready to perish. Is your actual life any help to others? Are you of those who make sunshine about you by the kindness of your looks and words and deeds, so that in your loving presence all cares and troubles vanish and the whole being expands? Is there a spot in all the earth which but for you would have been darker and drearier than it is? Is there a soul in all the world that seeing your good works is led to glorify the Father in heaven?

I remember once seeing a very lovely sight, which I often recall with pleasure. I looked into a dark dripping cave in a mountain glen, and at the end of it there was a little tuft of moss on a crumbling ledge, which caught an adventurous sunbeam that penetrated into the cave, and threw it back with a brilliant sparkle. It seemed as if the sunbeam was surprised to see such a bright mirror in which to reflect itself in such a dreary place. Each tiny leaflet of the moss was revealed in the clear light, and glistened as if it had been made of the purest gold. It looked in that transfigured light as it might have appeared under the microscope, with every point of beauty fully disclosed. Like that tiny moss, you should shine in God's light, reaching you in your lonely sphere and in your humble ways, so that all around you should see the beauties which the grace of Christ has brought out in you, and so be led to love and praise Him, as I was led by the little burnished moss to praise and admire the divine hand that made it.

The works that shine before men must be

prepared with care and wrought in faith and love, if they are to accomplish this great object. Have you ever heard how the Roman Catholics prepare the candles that are to be used in great ceremonies of the Church? The bees that make the wax are blessed. The flowers that yield it grow in the cloister gardens under the shadow of the church. The wax is collected by the priests, and shaped after prayer and the chanting of hymns into candles in the chapel. And so with what care ought the works to be wrought, that are so to shine that men may be led by them to glorify the Father in heaven. They must be pure and holy indeed, if they are to attract the careless or censorious eyes of the world, and to make the ungodly think of the Father of Lights, the author of every good and perfect gift, while they admire their beauty.

Such good works must shine always, not merely fitfully and occasionally. There is a kind of mineral, which, if it is warmed, will shine with a beautiful green colour, so long as the heat remains, and then it becomes dull and opaque. Humboldt mentions in his

"Travels" that he found in the bed of a river in Siberia pebbles of this mineral, which shone with great brilliancy all night after having been warmed by the sun during the previous day, but their light vanished when they got cold in the morning. And are there not good works done by Christian people under a pious impulse, when their feelings have been made warm and enthusiastic by special services, which shine like this stone so long as the impulse lasts? But when this ardour of the soul cools, their works no longer glow with their former beauty of holiness, and sink down to the level of the common tasks of the world, cold and dull and perfunctory. Such fitful flashes of goodness cannot attract and fix the admiring eye, and lead from admiration to imitation. Only the steady, continuous shining of God's jewels, those who are always basking in the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, living in the warmth and effulgence of divine love, can do this. And it should be the aim of each of you to live so near to Christ that you may always catch His reflection, and show forth His

praise in all you say and do. You should seek to have His life in you that your own life may be raised to a higher spiritual vitality, and may therefore glow with a heavenly effulgence ; and be like the angel which the apostle saw in the sun, giving a distinct and beautiful personality to the light that shines in you and around you from heaven. A life so vivified will by its light make its very trials and sufferings to add to the loveliness of the world; just as the invisible dust of the disastrous eruption of Krakatoa, diffused through our western skies, gave those gorgeous colours and gradations of hues which made our sunrises and sunsets at the time like visions of the Apocalypse.

God has orbed and concentrated His light and heat in sun, moon and stars, instead of spreading them widely over the firmament, in order that in that way His light and heat might be better diffused. And so He centres and orbs in you the light and heat of His gospel, in order that you may radiate it around you for the benefit of others less favourably gifted and situated. How dreadful

is our Lord's condemnation of all selfishness in the spiritual life: "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." There is no image more terrible than that; a star that should be radiating light diffusing darkness instead. Heat is a mode of motion; and so is light; and it is because light is a more rapid mode of motion than heat that it shines with greater brightness. And so life is also a mode of motion, and the more vital and active the life is, the more it shines. Darkness must therefore be the cessation of motion; it must mean stillness and death. And to that condition a soul that ceases to shine, because it ceases to be active in the Master's service, sinks—the blackness of death and of darkness for ever.

The Heavenly Wind

> "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*"
>
> JOHN iii. 8.

HAVE you ever seen a breeze passing over a hayfield on a sunny summer day? It is one of the most beautiful sights in Nature. The tall, slender stems of the rye-grass, crowned at the top with spikes of purple bloom, bow their heads before the wind; and the meadow from end to end ripples in waves of light and shade, like the surface of the sea;

while the gentle sound produced by the motion carries out the delusion, and makes you think that you hear the lapping of the waters on the shore. The whiffs of wind that cause these picturesque effects are sudden and capricious. They come in a moment, and pass away in a moment. You do not see the invisible currents of air that give rise to them; and you know not from what quarter they will blow, but you feel their cool breath fanning your cheek, and you see them rippling the freckled cornfield and the purple hay-meadow, and you hear their dreamy sigh as they pass on. Equally beautiful is the passing of the wind through the summer foliage of the woodland. How it turns up the paler undersides of the leaves, and tips the green billows, as it were, with foam, and produces a slumberous, all-pervading murmur like the sound of many waters! Very striking, too, is the presence of the wind in a pine-forest. Suddenly the fragrant stillness is broken by a faint distant moaning. It approaches nearer, and becomes a mighty rushing sound in the branches overhead. It sets all your senses on edge; you

strain your attention, and you seem to await the coming of some mysterious invisible being into the dim sanctuary of the trees.

Our Lord had doubtless often gazed upon the ripples of the breeze in the cornfields on the plain of Esdraelon, listened to "the lovely laughter of the wind-swept wheat" on the shore of Gennesareth, and heard "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees" in the upland valleys of Judea. And in all likelihood He was listening, in the pauses of His conversation with Nicodemus, to the sigh of the homeless night-wind, as it was sweeping past on downy wings; and as His habit was to take advantage of the things and occurrences of the moment as illustrations in His teaching, so He made use of this fitful breeze to explain the operations of the free invisible Spirit of God in the human soul. You know the movements of the viewless wind only by their effects; and so the Spirit's dealing with a human soul in the act of new-making it, cannot be perceived by the senses, but the proof of it is the new creation which He produces.

But there is more in the comparison than this mere superficial mystery common to them both. The words of Christ are deeper than they seem. The operations of the wind have a closer and more essential resemblance to the operations of the Spirit. By a wonderful instinct, all the primitive names applied to life physical and spiritual have been derived from the wind. God breathed into man's nostrils at first the breath of life, and he became a living soul. Breathing is the primal and essential characteristic of every living creature. The breath is the life. And this original significance has been applied to the soul as well. The word "ghost" was at one time supposed to show its physical origin in the allied word "gust," a rude and sudden blast of wind, although some recent authorities question this relationship. Spirit itself is derived from *spiro*, to breathe, and its fundamental allusion is to the breath of the wind as it murmurs through the leaves.

Bearing this origin of the word in mind, it may be said that the wind is in the natural world what the Holy Ghost is in the spiritual

world. It is by the wind that Nature is quickened, that the air is kept fresh and the waters pure. It is by means of it that the sap in the veins of plants is circulated, and the life-movements of herb and tree are carried on. The shape of every leaf depends upon the amount of wind to which it is exposed. Where it is always calm, the leaves are broad, like the palms in the tropics; where it is always stormy, the leaves are narrow and much divided, like the needles of the pine-trees in the exposed northern mountains, so that the wind may pass easily through them. And every form of leaf between these two extremes is shaped by the degree of wind that prevails where it grows. It is from the wind that the vegetable kingdom builds all its structures. The huge trunk and wide-spreading branches of the oak-tree are formed out of the invisible air. It is by the constant passing of the air through our lungs that our life is maintained, and all the movements of our life are kept up.

And is it not so with the Holy Ghost in the spiritual world? He is the source of all

spiritual life. He quickens the soul, inspires the mind, moulds the character and conduct after the divine pattern, and animates us with a heavenly zeal, so that we may grow up into the divine likeness. Without the Spirit all is stagnant and dead; no pulse of true life beats, no heavenly breath kindles in the cold and desolate scene.

But I want you particularly to notice that the action of the wind is not merely mechanical, but may also be said to be vital. It does not merely raise a ripple on the water, or move a sail, or bow the ears of the corn and the branches of the trees. It is not merely idly playing, as you suppose, capriciously blowing where it listeth. It is on a special mission, and has an earnest and most important purpose to perform. It is not meant merely to bring out a new beauty for the poetic eye in the field, to produce picturesque effects of light and shade in the meadow. It is designed to carry on the vital processes by which the grass and the corn are perpetuated season after season. It is one of the most important agents in the fertilisation of plants. The breeze that

passes over the hayfield and the cornfield carries off the pollen dust from the tall flower spikes of one plant, and applies it to the flower spikes of another plant, and so causes them to produce seed. Without the agency of the wind, the grass and the corn would perish ; and there would be no food for our cattle, and our daily bread could not be given to us.

And how wonderful is the mutual adaptation between our trees and fields and the wind that blows where it listeth among them ! Every one must be struck with this harmony, as implying a wise design and a faithful Creator. The flowers of wind-fertilised plants are destitute of those varied and brilliant hues, and fragrant scents and honey sweetness, which plants that are fertilised by insects need to possess and display in order to attract those insects. To such lures the wind, of course, is insensible. But wind-fertilised plants have special contrivances to facilitate the action of the wind regarding their pollen, in dispersing it from plant to plant. Such plants have their flowers on

tall upright stems, so as to enable the pollen all the better to be caught up by the air; and trees that have their catkins fertilised by the wind flower early in the year, when the wind is strongest and most constant, and before the leaves have opened to interrupt by their dense masses the free scattering of the pollen. The stamens or threads on which the pollen is produced are slender and hang freely, so that the gentlest breeze is sufficient to loosen the precious dust and carry it away. The grains of pollen, too, are extremely light so as to be easily transported, and they are flat in shape so as to spread out as large a surface as possible to the wind. The quantity of pollen, moreover, is far greater than can be used, so as to make the likelihood of some of the grains taking effect surer. It fills the atmosphere to such an extent as to produce in sensitive nostrils the annoying complaint of hay-fever. The cereal-blossoms, unlike other blossoms which open many times and at stated hours of the day, open only once, and in all kinds of weather, though most frequently in sunny. They are

open only about twenty minutes, or half an hour, and the whole of the pollen is discharged in one or two minutes.

All these wonderful adaptations between the wind and the fertilising of the plants, upon which our bread and milk, and timber, and many others of the necessaries and comforts of life depend, show to us that the wind is not an aimless, capricious thing, but is held in the fists of Him who commands it to execute His great and gracious purpose in the world. And when you see the breeze rippling over a cornfield, or a hay-meadow in June, or hear it sighing among the pine-woods and willow-trees, about the same time, you may be sure that it is not merely to make beautiful effects of light and shade, and wave-like motions in the landscape, or sweet musical sounds in the tree-tops, that the wind thus bloweth where it listeth, but to perpetuate the life of trees and herbs, and store up food for man and beast.

Now I want to point out the strong resemblance between this vital process which the wind carries on in plant-life, and the gracious

influences of the Holy Spirit in the human heart. As the young life of the trees and the grasses is born by the agency of the natural wind, so is the new life born in the soul by the agency of the Holy Spirit. The bread of life is produced in the same way as the bread of the body. Jesus breathed upon the disciples in the upper room at Jerusalem, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." He had purchased the gift by His own finished work, by His death and resurrection. It was the proof that His work was sufficient for our salvation, and that God was pleased with it and accepted it; and as the token of His acceptance gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples because of their faith and love. And how wonderful was the change which it produced! The disciples became consciously and visibly new creatures. What an amazing effect was produced by the outpouring of the Pentecostal Spirit! Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind; and after that came a visible token of the Spirit's presence. An appearance as of cloven tongues of fire rested upon the

Apostles. And that rushing wind and those tongues of flame accomplished a mighty revolution. It was the birthday of the Church The Apostles went forth to preach the Gospel, with such a powerful insight and inspiration, that thousands were born again in a single day.

And so it has been ever since. The Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father, the gift of the Saviour; and Jesus breathes upon the souls of believers, and imparts to them the Holy Spirit, who begins and carries on the good work of grace in them. Just as the air of heaven sets a-going the lungs of the new-born child, and is the means by which the blood is purified and circulated, and all the movements of its body are carried on; so the divine breath of the Spirit quickens the soul, and stirs up in it all the blessed operations of the new life. The wind cannot of itself impart life; it can only use and apply the means of life. In vain would the breeze pass over a cornfield, or through a pine-forest to produce young life in them, unless there were living germs already in

existence, appointed for the purpose, upon which the wind could operate. The office of the breeze is to take these germs where they are wanted, and so to apply them that they may accomplish the vital purposes for which they are designed. The wind bloweth with seeming waywardness, and you do not see how it works; but its movements are regulated by law, and it helps secretly to fill the ears of the corn with grains, and the cones of the pine-trees with seeds, and the hazel catkins of the copse with nuts. Marvellous is the effect of the wind, when it works with a tool. Carrying with it the sand of the desert, it sculptures the face of the rock into the most grotesque figures. But its action when its edge is a dead mineral substance like sand, is only destructive. When, on the other hand, it has got for its edge a living germ, its action is constructive, converting the wilderness into a garden, and making the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

And so it is with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not impart life directly; He communicates it by means of the Word of God.

He makes the doctrines living principles ; the outward revelation an inward experience. He takes of the things that are Christ's, and shows them to you in all their suitableness to the wants of your souls. He works by means of the Gospel and makes you willing to receive it, and rest upon it for pardon, peace, and purity. And so you are born again, not of corruptible, but of incorruptible seed. And while all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass ; the grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away—the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you. And by means of it you bring forth the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, holy desires, and all good actions. You grow by the "engrafted word," the *emphutos logos*, or literally the in-growing word, that penetrates into your spiritual life, as distinguished from mere knowledge that lies only in your intellect and memory. The action of the living Word as applied by the Spirit to the heart and conscience, is like that of the pollen grain applied by the wind to the stigma of a

plant. It becomes in-growing ; it penetrates the soul as the pollen penetrates the pistil ; and by enlightening the understanding and quickening the conscience, it forms the new spiritual life in the soul.

Without the Gospel of Jesus Christ the work of the Spirit would be in vain. And without the Spirit applying the Gospel to the souls of men, all human preaching and all human hearing would be in vain. It would be as idle as the passing of the wind over the waving grass that had no flower-spike on it. There might be beautiful effects of light and shade caused by the movement, but there would be no fruit, no seed, no life. The preaching of the Gospel without the Spirit's power might give rise to beautiful natural emotions, but it would not help to bring forth the fruit that is unto holiness, and whose end is everlasting life. The power of the Spirit without the Word, could we suppose such a thing possible, would only produce a wild enthusiasm, a fiery fanaticism, a zeal without knowledge that could give rise to no lasting beneficial results. We cannot be converted

except by the Word of God. You hear then the sound of the divine Wind in the preaching of the Gospel. Listen to it and obey the heavenly voice. God loves to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, much more, He Himself tells us, than parents love to give good gifts to their children. He has given to you His unspeakable gift. And He offers to you the gift of the Spirit, by whose power alone you can receive and benefit by that unspeakable gift. Let your prayer then be to the divine Spirit, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." And if the wind of the Spirit thus quickens and fertilises your soul, you will be able to add: "Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits."

The Yoke of Christ

"*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*"—MATTHEW xi. 29.

IN Bible lands the ox was used to plough the fields and draw the carts. To enable it to do this, a piece of hard bent wood, long, rude and clumsy, was put upon its neck, to which were fastened the traces of the plough, or the shafts of the cart. The yoke served the same purpose on the ox which the collar does on the horse with us. Indeed, although

there are no yokes upon our horses now, the old word which belongs to the oxen is still familiarly used among us; and the farm servant speaks about yoking the horses, showing that in former times cattle were employed in our own country instead of horses as beasts of burden. I have frequently seen in Italy and in the south of Europe oxen yoked to the plough or cart; great, gentle white creatures, with beautiful soft, patient eyes. It is one of the commonest sights of the country; and it is exactly the same as it was in the days of our Lord, for in these southern and eastern lands nothing ever changes.

Now, when the yoke is laid upon the neck of the ox, it means that it has got some special work to do; that it is not to be left any longer to graze idly in the field, or to do what it pleases. By the aid of the yoke, the rude primitive plough is attached to it, and it has to draw it through the hard rough ground, and to make the long straight furrows, into which the farmer is to cast his seed. Or it is harnessed between the shafts of a huge wooden cart, and has to pull

a heavy load along the uneven jolting road. The yoke controls it entirely, makes it do whatever the driver wishes. It prevents it from lying down or turning aside. It can only go on patiently in the straight course which is marked out for it, until its allotted task is done; and then the yoke is lifted off its neck, and it is allowed to go free and enjoy itself in the open field.

This is the homely image which our Saviour uses in His beautiful sermon; and if you will attentively consider it, you will find that it has a deeper meaning than is usually given to it. The mistake which people are apt to commit is to imagine that the yoke to which Christ refers is only for one person. You think that each person has a separate yoke; and when Christ bids you take His yoke, He makes over to you His own yoke instead of the one you carry. Your own yoke is one of sin and misery—the heavy burden which you make for yourself by your foolish and wayward conduct, and which presses you to the earth. But Christ's yoke is one of peace and contentment; it is not only easy to bear, but

it helps you along, and makes your heaviest task light, and your hardest work a pleasure. And Christ exchanges with you to your great advantage if you will only let Him. This no doubt is a very precious truth, which it is well for every one to learn, but it is not exactly the truth of the text. The idea of the text is far truer to Eastern customs. Sometimes, indeed, the yoke is put on the neck of one ox, but it is very seldom that only one ox is employed to plough with. Nearly always two are employed, for the ground is rough and stony and difficult to turn up, and the plough is a rude clumsy instrument of wood that needs a great deal of force to drive it through the soil. The yoke is therefore most frequently made for two oxen.

And when you grasp this idea, you will fully understand the language of our Lord. It is not of a single, but of a double yoke that He speaks. In all probability, when He was speaking to the people He saw a man ploughing in a neighbouring field with two oxen, keeping time and step with each other by means of the wooden yoke laid on their necks,

that united them together. That common rural sight suggested to Him the beautiful comparison of the text; and He made the thing that was most familiar to the people, as He was in the habit of doing, a means of spiritual instruction to them. And the point of the lesson that He taught is, that this double yoke is laid over Himself and His disciple or follower. He and the believer in Him are harnessed together as it were in the same plough, and they have to drag it together. This was what St. Paul too meant, when he spoke of Timothy as his true yoke-fellow, joined with him in bearing the same yoke of the Gospel, and doing the same work for their divine Master.

You remember the excuse which one of the persons made who was invited to the supper of the great man, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." Now, one of the ways in which a yoke of oxen is proved or trained in the East, is to put a young ox that has never done any work alongside of an old, well-trained and experienced companion, in order that it may learn of it how to act and

to behave itself. The young ox does not like it. It is frightened at the unaccustomed pressure of the yoke upon its neck. It rebels against the constraint that is put upon it. It rears and turns itself about and throws itself down. It kicks against the goad with which the ploughman is guiding his team. The goad is a long stick with a sharp iron point, and of course as the young ox wildly dashes its hind-legs against the iron prick of this goad, it wounds itself. But all the time its steady companion is patiently walking on beside it and dragging the plough. By degrees the young ox finds out that its struggles are useless. It is fatiguing itself to no purpose. The more it rebels the heavier the yoke galls it, and the more it kicks against the prick of the goad, the more it hurts itself. Wearied out, it at length submits itself to the yoke, obeys the guiding of the goad, and patiently keeps step with its calm companion in dragging the plough through the furrow. And it now finds that which was difficult easy, and that which tortured it a relief.

Now, that is the picture which Jesus bids

you look at, and learn a most important lesson from. How exceedingly graphic, and yet how exquisitely simple it is! With the most wonderful condescension He compares Himself to the old ox in the plough. He takes upon Himself the one side of the yoke, and He invites you to come and occupy the empty place beside Him. He is the meek and lowly one. He has been accustomed to the yoke. He has learned obedience by the things which He suffered. He was made under the law; and was subject to His parents. From His earliest years He was about His Father's business. His very meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him; and not till the sunset of life gave release could He say, "I have finished the work which the Father gave me to do." He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. What a perfect beauty and consistency there was in His whole life of toil and obedience! How patiently and willingly and without a murmur did He bear all the heavy burdens laid upon

Him, and carry the heavy cross from the cradle to the grave.

This is the divine Yoke-fellow of whom you are to learn, moving side by side with you, that you may imitate His patient endurance, His meekness and lowliness of spirit; that you may curb your proud, haughty, rebellious nature and become meek and lowly like Him. You are to watch how He behaves, until you have the same mind in you that was in Him, and you can submit with all docility to the yoke which is laid upon you and which Jesus shares with you. This is not easy to flesh and blood. You remember how the prophet compares Ephraim to a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, and how that proud, haughty tribe chafed against the restraints of God's law, fought hard to get its own wayward will, and to escape from the yoke of God into idolatry. It bemoaned its hard fate, its loss of freedom. And you remember how Jesus used the same image, in that sublime moment when He arrested the journey of Saul of Tarsus, as he was drawing near to Damascus on his dreadful errand.

The Hebrew persecutor was like the stubborn ox, struggling against the convictions of God's truth in his heart, and refusing to yield to his own better feelings and to be led in the way of righteousness and peace. What was it that conquered the proud spirit of the self-righteous Pharisee, and made him yield at once? It was the meek and lowly appearance of Jesus beside him harnessed to the same yoke. For even in the dazzling splendour of the heavenly vision, you notice how Jesus used a homely image taken from common farm-work, just as in the magnificent constellation in the midnight heavens you can trace the outlines of the common plough of earth. He spoke about Saul's kicking against the pricks, like a young untamed ox put for the first time to the plough, and wounding itself by its mad dashes against the goad.

Jesus of Nazareth revealed Himself even in heaven as still bearing the yoke of His people, afflicted in all their afflictions. It was Himself that was persecuted when His people were persecuted. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Amid all the glory of God's throne

He was altogether unchanged, still the meek and lowly one that He was on earth. And when Saul saw this, he was subdued at once. The great strife between his will and God's will was over, and he became a new creature. "Lord! what wilt Thou have me to do?" he asks in deepest humility and submissiveness. He was not broken in and conquered by force, but his heart was touched, his spirit was changed, by divine grace; and the sight of Jesus of Nazareth bearing meekly the heavy yoke of humanity made him count it all joy to take his share in the blessed work. And throughout the rest of his life, how patient and gentle and submissive he was! He had learned in whatsoever state he was therewith to be content. And in the midst of his severest trials and most trying privations and hardships he had rest in his soul, for he had the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

And what can make you so submissive as the sight of your Saviour's meekness and lowliness of spirit, of the Son of God bearing patiently the cross which you despise, performing dutifully the task which you spurn?

There is nothing so well fitted to wean you from pride as to see humility in an acknowledged superior. If a great lord or lady unites meekness with exalted station, and performs a task which you think is beneath you, how effectually does it rebuke your vanity, and make you feel ashamed of yourself by the contrast. It is recorded of the great General Washington, the first President of the United States, that on one occasion, as he was visiting the headquarters of his army in common clothes, he saw a corporal refusing to do some work, on the ground that it was not suitable to his rank and would soil his hands. General Washington stepped down at once and gave the help that was required; and as he turned to go away, he said to the corporal that the next time any work of that kind needed to be done, he was to send for the President of the United States, and he would come and do it for him. You can imagine the feelings of the soldier. The Bible, in order to subdue the haughtiness and self-will that are so natural to the human mind, brings home this very motive with overwhelming power to your

hearts. He who was in the form of God and who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant. He washed the feet of His disciples, when none of themselves would have condescended to do the menial task. He endured the cross, despising the shame which our sin deserved. And surely before that wonderful meekness and lowliness of spirit, when you realise it, the high looks of the lofty must be brought low, and the very root of pride and self-will must be cast out from the heart. Surely no one can withstand the lesson which this wonderful example of Christ's humility teaches.

It was forbidden by the Jewish law to plough with an ox and an ass together, and the reason of the prohibition was that the ass, being the smaller and weaker animal, would have more than its own share of work if it were to keep pace with the ox; it would be too heavily burdened. The one animal would hinder or pull aside the other; and thus an uneven furrow would be the result, and the work of ploughing would be badly done. Now, He

who was so kind and considerate to the lower animals as this law proves Him to have been, whose tender mercies are over all His works, will be equally tender and considerate towards you. The yoking of Him and you together to the same plough, as it were, is an unequal yoking. You are weak and He is strong. But this unequal yoking is for the purpose of making His grace sufficient for you and perfecting His strength in your weakness. The heaviest portion of this yoke is taken by Him. He stands by your side, your almighty, loving Helper, and you can lean upon Him and He will sustain you. Your end of the yoke will feel easy when Christ is bearing all the weight of it at the other and heavier end. Your affliction is light and but for a moment, when Christ is putting into the other scale the sufficiency of His own help and sympathy, and the greatness of the eternal blessedness which He is preparing for you through it.

Remember, then, that Jesus Christ is your Yoke-fellow—yoked with you to the same work. Think of every hard, disagreeable task you are called upon to do, as having

Christ with you harnessed to the task to help you to perform it. Learn of Him; imitate His example; be meek and lowly in spirit as He was. Bear the yoke patiently as He bore it. Give up your whole will gladly to God. Yield to Him, not like dumb, driven cattle, because you cannot help it and a remorseless fate is driving you on, but yield to Him like a loving child, because you give your heart to Him and know that His way is the best. Be not like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle; but, tamed and broken in by grace, gladly obey the divine voice. Christ seeks to hold you, not by the chain of slavish fear, but by the bands of love. His Spirit makes the unwilling willing. And thus giving yourselves freely to Him with the consent of your whole heart and nature, you will always be guided by His eye. There will be a perfect sympathy and harmony established between you. You will be always learning of Him; you will always cherish His meek and lowly spirit, and you will have rest in your souls, however heavy

may be your burdens and however hard your tasks. You will escape all that is bitter in the school of discipline, and the joy of the Lord strengthening you will bear you successfully through all your work of faith and labour of love.

The Rush

"Can the rush grow up without mire?"
Job viii. 11.

BILDAD, who said these words, was a very polite man. He professed to be a friend of Job, but was convinced in his own mind, notwithstanding his friend's high reputation for goodness, that he was guilty of some secret crime or vice which brought down upon him the punishment of God. Job could not, as he thought, have been such a great

sufferer unless he had been a great sinner. But Bildad could not bring himself to tell him that to his face in plain words. He therefore took refuge in the common custom of his people, and brought his charge against Job in a roundabout fashion, in the form of a proverb or figure of speech, in which his own opinion was supported by higher authority. He wanted Job to inquire of the former ages, and to search for the wisdom of the world's grey fathers. But who, it may be asked, were these persons ; for we believe that Job lived long before the time of Moses, when writing, though known, was little used, and men preferred to impart their knowledge by word of mouth ? In those far-off times there was one nation that was famous for its wisdom, and that had written even then many books, some of which have come down to our own day. Learned men from all parts of the world visited the schools and colleges of that nation, and brought back with them many rich treasures of knowledge. That nation was the Egyptian. And we find that the words which Bildad uses in the text were from

an Egyptian source. They formed, in fact, a proverb that was well known in Egypt from the remotest antiquity.

The rush to which he refers did not grow in the dry and parched land of Uz, which was the place where Bildad and Job lived. It grew principally in Egypt, and in one or two places in Northern Palestine. It is no other than the famous bulrush of the Nile, of which the ark was made in which the infant Moses was concealed; an ark of bulrushes being supposed to be a powerful charm for warding off all evil. The smooth rind or skin of this remarkable plant that once grew in great abundance in Egypt, but is now very scarce, supplied, when dried and beaten out and pasted together, the first material used for writing upon. Our word paper comes from its name papyrus. Perhaps Bildad, who from his style of speech was evidently a learned man, possessed an old Egyptian book made of papyrus leaves, in which he found the picturesque proverb of my text; and it would be a very curious thing if on the very leaf of a book made of the skin of the papyrus or

rush, there should be inscribed an account of the way in which the papyrus or rush itself grew on the swampy banks of the Nile—"Can the rush grow up without mire?"

Every plant needs water. Water forms the sap which circulates through the veins of every plant; is the internal stream along which little successions of floats continually go, carrying the materials of growth to every part of the structure. In Egypt we see in a very remarkable way the dependence of plants upon water; for vegetation only grows as far as the life-giving overflow of the annual inundation of the Nile extends. Beyond that point there is nothing but the parched leafless desert. Nothing can be more striking than the dry white sand and the long luxuriant grass side by side. There is no mingling of barren and fertile soil; and the two endless lines of grey and green come abruptly into contact.

But while other plants thus need water and are dependent upon it, they can nevertheless cling to life and preserve their greenness even during a pretty long drought. The rush, on

the contrary, cannot exist without water, even for the shortest period; and the burning sun of Egypt would destroy in a few hours every water-plant that grows in the Nile, were the stream to fail and cease to bathe its roots. Bildad tells us this in very striking language. He says: "While it is yet in its greenness and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb." That is to say, while other plants wither slowly and require to be cut down before they dry up, and even then they retain their greenness a long time, the rush shrinks up at once when it is quite fresh and uninjured, if the nourishing water be withdrawn from it, and it is left exposed to the scorching sun. No other plant so quickly withers in the absence of water, just because it is made to grow in the water. All its structure is adapted to that kind of situation and to no other. Its material is soft and spongy and filled with water, which evaporates at once when the circulation is not kept up.

There are in Nature two kinds of plants at opposite poles from each other, and each

wonderfully suited to the place in which it grows. There is the cactus found in the dry, parched deserts of Mexico, where there is no water, no running stream, and no rain for weeks and months together. It has thick leathery fleshy stems instead of leaves, without any evaporating pores on their surface, so that whatever moisture they get from the rare rain or the dew by their roots they keep and never part with, and therefore they can stand the most intense and long-continued drought, having a reservoir within themselves. And there is, on the other hand, the rush which grows with its root in the waters of the Nile and like a vegetable sponge cannot live for an hour without that outside water ascending its stem and flowing through all its structure. You know our own common rush cannot do without water. It always grows beside springs and the sources of streams, and on marshy lands. Wherever you see rushes growing you may be sure that the soil is full of water; and if the farmer drains the field where rushes grow, they speedily disappear and grass comes up in their place.

Now the moral which Bildad draws from that interesting fact of natural history is, that as the rush requires water for its life, so man can only live by the favour of God. It is the same truth that is conveyed in very similar words in the 17th chapter of Jeremiah, where the prophet says: "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." This striking image Bildad applied to Job. He insinuated that his afflicted friend was like the rush that had been forsaken by its nourishing waters, and therefore withered away. He forgot God, and therefore his paths were not prosperous. He was a hypocrite, and therefore his hope perished. You all know how false this accusation was; how upright and truly God-fearing Job was, and how therefore his misfortunes were chastisements of love and not judgments of wrath, proofs of God's

grievous, though gracious dealings with him to make him a nobler man, not punishments of some secret sin, or habitual transgression. But from Bildad's point of view, there seemed no other explanation of Job's terrible trials than that he had sinned greatly against God in some way or other, and that he was reaping in these sore trials the fruits of his own evil doings.

Your natural life is like that of the rush that grows in the water. Seven-tenths of your bodies is water. Seven-tenths of your bodies came from the last rains that fell. Your life is indeed a vapour, a breath, a little moisture condensed. You begin as a fish, and you swim in a stream of vital fluids as long as your life lasts. You can taste and absorb and use nothing but liquids. Without water you have no life. You know after a long drought how restless and parched and irritable you feel; and what a relief and refreshment the rain is when it comes. It shows you how necessary water is to the well-being of your bodies; how you cannot exist without it.

And if this be the case as regards your

natural life, what shall be said in regard to your spiritual? God is as necessary to your soul as water is to your body. Your souls thirst for God, for the living God; for He, and He alone, is the element in which you live and move and have your being. You are made for God as the rush is made for the water; and nothing but God can suffice you, as nothing but water can suffice the rush. So long as the rush grows in the swampy mire, and has its roots watered and its veins filled by the ever-flowing river, the burning sun of Egypt, instead of withering and consuming it, makes it only flourish more freshly and greenly, and grow up taller and more luxuriant. It converts the destroying sun into the best of friends. What would have been a curse is changed into a blessing. The rush with its head in the torrid sunshine, and its root in the unfailing waters, is stimulated from below and from above. Nothing can exceed the luxuriance of the rush or papyrus in the waters of Merom, a lake to the north of the Sea of Galilee. There it covers a vast impenetrable swamp several miles square, with

myriads of green stems, sixteen feet high and three inches thick. And all this enormous vegetation is the result of the unfailing water and the burning sun; the one helping the other to produce this amazing growth of plant-life.

Now, what you require for your spiritual well-being is that you should grow beside the well of water that springeth up into everlasting life. Jesus can be to you rivers of water in a dry place; dividing like the branching mouth of the Nile over every part of the delta of your heart, irrigating the whole desert of your life. The glorious Lord can be to you a place of broad rivers and streams. And quickened and refreshed by this living element in which you are rooted, you can defy the drought of evil circumstances, and turn all hostile things to blessed uses. You can flourish in the withering atmosphere of the world, and endure the fiery trials of life, just because all your well-springs are in God, and the sources of your human steadfastness and hope are high up in heaven. You are independent of the precarious supplies of the world. The sun

shall not light upon you nor any heat; and the things of the world that would otherwise be against you will work together for your good.

God promised by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses." What were those willows that loved the water, and could not do without it? They were not the dull grey-green trees that you know by that name, and that are so familiar to you beside your native streams. They were the fair oleanders or rose-willows, with long willow-like leaves, and lovely large crimson flowers like roses. The banks of the Jordan, and the course of every stream in the rainy season, and the shores of the Sea of Galilee, are fringed with the brilliant pink bloom of this splendid plant. The Jews hung their harps upon the real weeping-willows of Babylon, and thought upon those lovely rose-willows of their native land; just as the exile

in India or Africa might dream with longing desires of the daisy-fields and primrose-woods of England. Thus, you see, it is not as a mere rush with only a dull uniform greenness, relieved only by the brown rusty tassel of a blossom at its top, with no brightness or beauty about it, that God wishes you to grow up into beside the water-courses of His own grace; but as oleanders or rose-willows, putting forth brilliant crimson blossoms, making a perfect garden in the wilderness, and attracting every eye by the beauty of your religion.

There are plants whose ancestors grew in water only and could not live except in pools and streams, and yet, by some strange change of circumstances, they have forsaken the waters, and now grow in the very heart of tropical forests, on the mossy forks of trees where they find some soil and moisture stored up for them. I know one plant of this kind called Utricularia, whose sisters inhabit our peat-mosses, and have little white bladders full of air on their long thin stems, which serve the purpose of buoying them up in the water like floats, and also of catching insects,

upon which, strange to say, this remarkable class of plants, like the sundews, live. This species of Utricularia now grows on trees in the damp mountain-woods of the West Indies, far away from water; and it there keeps up the air bladders and the other contrivances which were necessary in the water, but are of no use to it now on the trees. It has become adapted to its surroundings; and it grows as well as it can in its new situation; but it has not the beauty and grace of its sisters that grow in the waters. And we have something of the same kind in the animal world. There are several species of water-birds that live only in the woods, far away from all water. There are curious creatures called tree-ducks, living in the woods of Texas, and feeding upon seeds and grain. They will alight upon a stalk of growing corn like a blackbird, and make their nests among the lofty trees. They are real ducks with broad soft bills, and webbed feet, entirely different from the other birds of the woods in their structure and appearance. These ducks were made for the waters; but by some perverted instinct or force of circum-

stances they never resort to the rivers or streams, to seek their food there.

And are there not similar cases in the human world? Are there not persons made for God, as the rush is made for the mire, or the duck for the water, and yet, by a perverted instinct, they do not make their refuge in God, or seek their happiness in Him. God made them for Himself; but they have sought out many substitutes for God, and they alienate themselves from Him, and seek their happiness in other persons and things. And if you live without God, if you live for worldly instead of for heavenly things, you become like a duck that forsakes its native element in the stream and lake and lives in the woods, and in such a situation finds no use for its webbed feet, or its soft broad bill, or for its peculiarly arranged plumage; you lose your highest powers and become degraded to the level of the things you love. And just as the duck, though it can adjust itself in a way to its novel circumstances among the trees, is not quite at home there, and finds its water qualifications unsuitable for its land

habitation; so, although you can adapt yourselves to an ungodly life, and seem contented with it, yet you cannot be entirely satisfied. The restless heart of the sinner is a terrible thing, with its ceaseless craving after something which it has not, and its deep discontent with its state and condition. Bildad well expressed it when he said, "Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish."

Seek, then, to grow in grace; for you must grow in something, and if not in grace, then you will grow in sin and degradation, in conditions for which you were not made, which will be continually unsuitable to you, and which will make you always wretched. The soil of grace is the only soil in which you can flourish and accomplish the purposes for which God made you; for there the roots of your being will draw living sap continually from the fountain of living waters that perpetually wells up. Growth in grace is not subject to the

changes and decays of earth. It is the only growth on which death has no power. Strive then to grow in that which must grow for ever. Strive to be like the rush, which is the thirstiest and the greenest of plants. Among the native tribes of Japan, the thirstiest man, we know not for what reason, is considered the holiest. But so it truly is in the Christian sense, for the thirstiest of you will receive most of the water of life, to make you fairest. As the secret of the rush's remarkable greenness is its hidden moisture; so the secret of your spiritual beauty is that your life is hid with Christ in God. Without Christ you can do nothing; you are like the rush without the water in which it grows, dry, withered and dead. With Christ you are like the rush with its root in the river; you will flourish and grow in that holiness whose end is everlasting life. You will indeed be a papyrus displaying on its own leaf the reason of its flourishing condition, in the unmistakable hieroglyphics of Nature which he who runs may read; a living epistle of Christ known and read of all men.

The Banner of Love

"*His banner over me was love.*"
SONG OF SOLOMON ii. 4.

You know the use of a banner or flag is to distinguish one regiment from another in the army, and in the navy to point out what nation any particular ship belongs to. When the Queen lives at Windsor, the standard of England floats from the flagstaff on the tower of the palace. And if you see a flag flying from the top of a castle anywhere,

that is a sign that the noble owner of it is at home. Certain flags when they are seen inspire confidence, and others produce terror. When the skull and cross-bones painted on the pirate's flag used to be seen on the seas, it always created great alarm; and the people living on the southern shores of Europe used to dread, above everything, the appearance of the hand with a scimitar and the crescent on the flag of the Algerine corsairs which sailed into their ports, for they knew too well that they came only to ravage their coasts with fire and sword, and to carry away slaves to Africa. To hang out the red flag is to give the signal of defiance and battle. To display the black flag is the sign that no quarter will be given to the vanquished. To show the yellow flag is to indicate that there is some infectious disease on board, or that the passengers are under quarantine. To hang out the white flag is to call for mercy, or to show when a vessel arrives on a strange coast that it comes to trade or for some other peaceable purpose. To hang the flag half-mast high is a token of mourning, and to

strike or lower the flag is a sign of respect or surrender.

These customs in regard to flags date back to the remotest antiquity, and are familiar all over the world. It is to one of them that my text refers. Solomon is seated in his banqueting-hall in the house of the forest of Lebanon; and while he and the Shulamite partake together of the rich feast, the royal banner floats over the roof of the palace, and tells every passer-by that the king is within. The fair maiden whom he loves is proud of his favour. The flag that unfurls itself over her has on it the device of his love for her, and she knows that under that banner nothing can harm her.

When the Israelites marched from Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan, they set up their banners in the name of the Lord. Each tribe had its own banner. The tribe of Judah had the lion on it; the tribe of Ephraim the ox; the tribe of Benjamin the wolf; the tribe of Issachar the ass, and so on. Each tribe took up its own fixed position beside the ark to guard it. Over all the

banners was the great banner inscribed with the motto "Jehovah Nissi," the Lord my Banner. His pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night protected His people; and when they looked up at that ensign in the heavens, that marched along with them wherever they went, they knew that the eternal God was their refuge, and that no evil could befall them.

The Israelites walked by sight. They saw with their bodily eye that the Lord was on their side; that His banner over them was love. But you have to walk by faith. You see no sign in the sky above you as you march through life to strengthen and encourage you, except it be the blueness of the sky itself. Over you all that wonderful blue banner is displayed day by day. Its colour is pre-eminently a heavenly colour, and proclaims to you that God is love. And as the vault of heaven with its vast dimensions defies man's puny efforts at measurement, so the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ passeth knowledge. The thunder of God's wrath against sin may

for a time hide His love; but the clouds speedily pass away; His anger is but for a moment; judgment is His strange work; and the calm bright blue sky shines out again, for He delighteth in mercy. If you believe in Jesus, though you see no sign in the sky such as the Israelites saw, you will know assuredly that His banner over you is love.

You have to fight against many enemies, chiefly against yourself—the lower, meaner part of you, which is ever trying to corrupt and enslave you, and against the world with its sinful pleasures and temptations, and against the devil who is seeking to drag you down to degradation and death. But against all these foes you can set up the name of Christ as your banner; Christ who loved you with a love which the cross of Calvary alone can measure. With the banner of Christ's love over you, you will conquer all meaner selfish loves. "Be of good courage, I have overcome the world," is the inscription on your banner, as you endeavour to live above the world; and Christ gives you power to overcome in the same way as He did, and to

make your life beautiful and heavenly like His own.

It is remarkable how almost uniformly the banners of all nations have on them some religious sign or other. They have always been considered sacred, and connected with the faith of man in a higher Power. In Roman Catholic countries banners are used in religious processions, to which they give great solemnity and splendour. On most of the flags of Europe the cross appears in some shape or other. The red, white and blue of the British flag are said to have been originally the signs of the Trinity; the white of the holiness of God, the blue of the love of Christ, and the red of the force or fire of the Spirit. The Union Jack was nothing originally but a single cross—the cross of St. George, introduced by Richard Cœur de Lion after his return from the Crusades. When England and Scotland were united James VI. of Scotland and I. of England added the cross of St. Andrew, and called the flag the Union Jack, from the Latin form of his name Jacobus. Later on the ensign of Ireland was

placed above the other two—the cross of St. Patrick. The Union Jack is thus made up of three crosses, belonging to the patron saints of England, Scotland and Ireland. The standard which the soldiers of Constantine the Great carried was the cross with a halo round it, which the emperor said he saw in a vision in the sky, one day when he was marching to an eventful battle, and it had the motto, "By this conquer." And so you have a banner over you with the cross upon it which makes your life sacred, and which protects the life that it consecrates. Constantine selected fifty of the stoutest and most religious of his soldiers to guard the banner of the cross, that was carried at the head of his army. It was to be borne by each of them in turn; and it is related that in a fierce battle, in which the soldier whose duty it was to carry the banner was struck with panic and fled, leaving the flag to his comrade, the cowardly soldier lost his life, while the soldier who boldly carried the sacred symbol escaped unhurt. And so while you guard this banner of Christ's love which you bear through life, it will guard

you. The cross which you clasp clasps you.

What a sense of security does the national flag give to the fortress or the ship of war over which it floats! When you see the Union Jack displayed on the guardship out there in the Clyde, you feel that all the power of Great Britain is available to defend your town, if an enemy should come to your shores. Whatever danger threatens you, threatens the Imperial Government under which you live. Every human being in this country has his own sense of personal weakness supported and strengthened by the assurance of his country's protecting power. And so Christ's banner of love is always over you to assure you that greater is He that is with you than all that can be against you. The arm of His might on which hang all the shields of the earth, will hold you unharmed amid all the ills of life. His strength will ever be made perfect in your weakness.

During a war in Cuba an Englishman got somehow involved in it through trying to succour some of the wounded. He was

seized on suspicion of being a spy, judged by the commanding officer, and in spite of every representation in his favour, he was condemned to be shot. The British Consul interfered on his behalf in vain. He was led out; his hands bound and his eyes blindfolded, and he was commanded to kneel in front of the shooting party detailed for his execution. At this supreme moment, the British Consul asked if he might speak to his countryman a moment, in case he had any last instructions to give. He advanced to the spot, with his hand in the breast of his coat, and with lightning rapidity drew out the Union Jack of England and folded it over the condemned man. "Now," he cried, "fire upon England's flag if you dare." Need it be added that this clever device was completely successful. The mighty power of England was too well known to be provoked. The shooting party was withdrawn, and the prisoner's life was spared. The banner of the British Consul over his friend was love, and it saved him from a terrible death. And so your Redeemer folds over you, condemned

by your sins and exposed to the wrath of God, the flag of His love, the flag of His righteousness, and cries, "Save from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom." And under the protection of that flag you can cry, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." The whole power of heaven is on your side, and who dare strike you?

What a wonderful sense of dignity and uplifting of spirit does a flag give! The soldier goes to battle under it with stronger courage, proud to fight for his country. He endures under it the greatest fatigues and privations, for he wishes to be worthy of his country's greatness. I have seen a little band of schoolboys marching along the road to the music of a penny whistle, and feeling that they were lords of the whole country, simply because one of their number held up at the top of a stick a red pocket-handkerchief streaming in the wind. In a foreign city, I always thought it was a grand animating sight to see the

British flag waving on the English Ambassador's residence, or the English Consul's office. It inspired one with a sense of the greatness of one's country, and gave one a feeling of security, that the humblest subject of this mighty empire away from his native country would have his rights protected and his interests looked after, though a stranger in a strange city. And so what a wonderful thought it is, that, pilgrims and strangers on earth, you are marching through life, and dwelling in your tents, under the banner of heavenly love, under the flag of the glorious country to which you belong, and whose freedom you enjoy now. Should it not strengthen you to overcome evil? Should it not inspire you to do good and great things worthy of that banner, to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called? Should not the thought of it come powerfully to help you to resist temptation? Should not the thought of it encourage you when you are faint and weary, and the battle of life seems too strong for you?

What deeds of valour have been performed

for Christ under that flag! Martyrs and confessors have been ready to die rather than that His cause should be disgraced or His standard lowered. In a terrible conflict in Virginia, a young soldier of the Federal Army who was the last man of his regiment was wounded. He was just putting a ball into his gun when a shot passed through his left hip and shattered it. He fell, but his captain lifted him up again, and carried him to a place of temporary safety, the young soldier protesting, "Never mind me, captain, but don't let the flag go down!" His thought was not of himself, but of the honour of his country and flag. And that should be the thought and utterance of every one of you with respect to Christ and His truth. If you have to suffer, to resist, to wrestle with blood, striving against sin; if you have to bear with scorn and ridicule or hatred or persecution, let each one of you say, "Never mind me, but don't let His flag go down."

You think it is a grand thing for a nobleman to sit at his rich feast, in his magnificent hall, with his flag flying at the top of his

castle. But it is far grander to think that the humblest of you, if you love the Lord Jesus Christ, is the guest of the King of kings and Lord of lords. When you are sitting at your own simple every-day meals, you have Him with you at your table; you partake in His company of the food which He has given to you; you have His blessing with it, and the banner of His love is unfurled over you all the time. That banner makes you all noble, sons of God and joint heirs with Christ Jesus, and therefore "Noblesse oblige" should be your motto through life. "I will act nobly, because I am noble."

But it is not only when you are sitting in the banqueting-house of life and all is prosperous with you, that His banner of love is over you. That banner is not for gala occasions only, for holidays and times of pleasure and grand display. It is much more for the sad moments of life. There are times when sorrow and sickness and pain come, and you are inclined to doubt God's love, and to take dark, desponding views of life, and to imagine that everything is against you. How re-

assuring then it is to know that this banner of love is over you all the time, telling you that the trouble is only temporary, and that it contains in its bosom a blessing that will make your life more fruitful when it has passed away! How comforting is the thought that "every cloud that veileth love, itself is love;" that if the blue banner is concealed for a time by a dense mist and you cannot see it with the eye of sense, the eye of faith can still see it spread out behind the cloud, giving you the confident feeling that love cannot act inconsistently with itself, but must be working gracious ends behind grievous providences.

That banner of love will go with you and be over you to the end. It will never be taken down, for nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus your Lord. With it floating over you, you will fear no evil when you pass down the dark valley. And when you die, it will not stand half-mast high, for your death will be precious in the sight of God. It will not be a defeat but a victory, in which you will be more than a conqueror, for your very wounds

will turn to blessings, your losses to gains, your death to life. It will not be a cause of sorrow but of joy in heaven. You have seen at a soldier's or sailor's funeral the British flag or the Union Jack laid over the coffin carried on the top of a gun-carriage. That flag told you that the soldier or sailor died in the service of his country, and that his country mourned his loss. The banner of his country over him was love. He had served under that banner while he was living ; and it accompanied him to the grave and honoured his dust. And so it will be with you. The heavenly country you serve will wrap its banner over you when you are dead, and claim you for its own.

The words of my text were once brought home to me in a very impressive way. I saw them one day, when I turned aside to visit a quiet country churchyard, carved on a humble tombstone. There was no other inscription but that, and the initials of the unknown person who slept below. But it told me everything that it was needful to know. It gave a new and more touching meaning to the old

familiar words. I wonder if any of you have ever seen what is called a hatchment, that is a large black frame with a coat-of-arms painted on it, fixed above the door on the outside wall of a house. I remember in my young days seeing a good many, and I always knew when I saw that gloomy sign that a nobleman had just died in the house. The sight used to give me a feeling of great solemnity and awe. That hatchment proclaimed the rank and dignity of the dead person. It was the banner of earthly pomp over the unconscious body, whose glory was now as the faded flower of the grass. It saddened one with the thought, that this was the end to which all the riches and honours of life come in the case of a human being, however exalted. But the beautiful words of the tombstone told me that over the lowly grave of one who had been altogether unknown on earth was the hatchment of heaven, indicating that one of heaven's princes or princesses was sleeping there, waiting under the watchful care of God for the awaking of the resurrection. That hatchment suggested thoughts, not of the vanity of earthly life, but

of the blessedness of an immortal hope. There was no sorrow, no repining expressed; there was nothing said of death or resurrection. It was felt that all was said in that one little sentence, "His banner over me is love." Everything was comprehended in that lovely inscription! It seemed like the message of the sisters of Bethany to Jesus: "He whom thou lovest is sick." They did not ask Jesus to come; they left everything to Himself, confident that He would do what was best, because He loved their brother. And so the sleeper in that grave left all to God and fell asleep on the bosom of infinite love, confident that God would do everything that was necessary for the soul that He saved and the dust that was precious to Him, because He redeemed it with the blood of His own Son.

It was a very lonely spot, at a great distance from the homes of men. No one came to the grave to weep there; there were no flowers on it, nothing but the green grass, which is Nature's tender flag, wrapped round the forsaken dead. Perhaps the friends that were dearest were far away in

some foreign land, or perhaps the weepers were themselves with the wept. But nevertheless the banner of God's love was over it, as sure as the blue sky over-arched it; and He would guard that grave till it should open and deliver the immortal dead, as the green calyx or sheath of a rare plant opens in spring to unfold and disclose the lovely blossom. Oh! that we all, young and old, had the same precious faith; for then over our banqueting-house, and over our chamber of sorrow, and over our field of battle, and over our grave, would float serenely and securely the banner of God's love, and, alike in life and in death, all would be well with us!

Apple Blossoms

"*Having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*"—1 Timothy iv. 8.

There are many plants whose blossoms you can gather and make bouquets of, for their only value consists in their beauty, or grace, or fragrance. Their blossoms are the best things about them. The fruit or seed they produce is too small, or hard, or tasteless to be worth anything. It is, therefore, of no account, and you are free to pluck

and make a present use of the blossoms, to delight you in your room with their beautiful colour, or elegant shape, or pleasant perfume.

But, on the other hand, there are some plants whose blossoms it would be a great waste to pluck. Beautiful and graceful as they are, they are only the preparation for something that is better, for sweet and satisfying fruit. It would be exceedingly wasteful to pull the blossoms of a cherry or an apple tree, although the pure white clusters of the one, and the rosy shells of the other, would make lovely nosegays to wear on your dress or to ornament your rooms. For these blossoms have a still higher value than they get from their mere beauty and grace. They produce crimson cherries and rosy-cheeked apples, which satisfy all the senses—not only the senses of sight and smell, which the blossoms minister to, but also the sense of taste, which the blossoms cannot gratify. It is far more sensible, therefore, to let them remain on the tree until they grow into fruit.

In this way apple blossoms, which are the summer promises of the orchard, are parables

of joys in human life that have to be waited for, whose full fruition is in the future. If you are in haste and impatient in regard to them, if you seek to enjoy them before the time, you get perhaps a certain amount of present satisfaction, but you lose what would have been a far greater and truer happiness, if you had only waited. How much of the waste and misery of life is caused by this plucking of apple blossoms—this premature indulgence, this longing to be happy, this haste to be rich, and to get at once all that life holds out to gratify mind and heart and body! On every side you see this reckless extravagance, this sacrificing of the future for the present, this old epicurean philosophy which takes hold of old and young, and makes the shortness of life a reason for recklessly crowding all that it can give or promise into the shortest possible space, having everything at once—saying, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

This impatience of God's wise law of order, this feverish, restless desire to anticipate it and have things out of their own proper

course, is of the very essence of sin. The first sin that was ever committed in the world was of this nature. God in His own good time, when it was best for our first parents to get it, would doubtless have given them liberty to pluck and eat the fruit of the forbidden tree—forbidden because, at that time, it would have done them harm to eat it; but Satan filled them with an impatient desire; they would not wait God's good time; they stretched forth their hand at once and plucked the fruit. And so they sinned and died, and brought sin and death into the world. And nearly all of human sin since has been of the same pattern, and arises from a desire to get immediately what we want—to take ourselves at once what we wish, instead of waiting till God gives it to us, when He sees that it is good for us to have it.

You see how common is this impatience, how natural it is to the human heart, when it extends even to the familiar things of our daily life. People seek to get flowers and fruits and vegetables out of their own proper course, and to enjoy the products of summer

in the heart of winter. The rich in their hot-houses and gardens can change the natural order of the world, and force flowers and fruits and vegetables to grow and ripen, so that they may have the use of them weeks and months before their own natural time. They have not thus to wait with patience for anything that they need. They can hasten them by artificial means. The wise man says that "everything is beautiful in its season," and, as already mentioned, it is only beautiful in its season, when it is adapted to the character of the season and in harmony with everything else that belongs to the season. But people wish to have the beauty and sweetness of Nature out of season, to have lilies amid the snows of January, and strawberries during the bleak winds of March. And the consequence is that, by thus anticipating the order of Nature, such persons never get anything when it is best and most enjoyable. They get everything prematurely, before its time, and it lacks the flavour and sweetness of what is ripened slowly and comes to maturity in its own proper time. This is but a small and

homely detail of a principle of universal application. People somehow think that it is grand to have things sooner than their neighbours can have them. It is a proof of their greater importance when Nature itself has to bend to their will. But they have to pay the inevitable penalty of getting fruits that have less flavour and give less satisfaction than those which other people wait patiently for. And so it is with the things of human life. If you get them too soon, they will not yield you the pleasure which they promised; they will be flavourless and unsatisfying.

All young life is impatient. Impatience is the one special characteristic of childhood and youth. Life is fuller of promise at this time than at any other. It spreads before the eye like a rich and varied feast, like a garden full of blossoms ready to be plucked. The senses are keener for enjoyment, and there is a restless longing to get all that life promises at once. Young people are in haste to grow up, and to obtain in childhood the advantages that men and women enjoy. And in this longing they trample under foot many of the

blessings of their present age, and lose the charming graces which should distinguish their early years. They are prematurely satiated, they have seen an end of all perfection, and find nothing new to interest or delight them. You know what happens if you try to open the bud of a lily and make it unfold its pure white heart to the sun too soon. You spoil the bud, you take away its beauty and grace by your violent haste; and you spoil the flower. Its growth is stopped; neither its bright hue nor its fragrance is developed; and before it is half expanded it begins at once to wither and decay. And so with the young child who seeks to be grown-up at once. The charm of the child and the beauty of the youth are both destroyed.

It would be well if all young people would remember that Jesus—their great Example—waited thirty long years in retirement before He entered upon His public ministry—helping His father, Joseph the carpenter, and placing Himself meekly under parental discipline in the rural home at Nazareth; and that even when He was full-grown, when He was

twenty-one, He waited nine years longer in obscurity and humble toil before He took up His public work. Childhood and youth are the period of preparation for after-life, in which wise and holy lessons can be most effectually imparted by teachers, and the discipline of the heart and character carried on most advantageously in the loving atmosphere of home. And it has been proved that, just as animals which have the longest infancy are the most highly developed in the end, so human beings who remain longest in the state of childhood and pupilage achieve highest distinction afterwards. And, therefore, all young people ought to look upon their childhood and youth as a most precious time of preparation, when a rich stock of good lessons and influences has to be laid in which may hereafter bring forth abundant fruit; and not be eager that their tender years, with all their wise teachings and loving restraints, should be got over as quickly as possible.

Young people also are impatient to get the pleasures of life at once, to get pleasures for their own sake apart from duties—pleasures

as themselves the end of life, and not as the sweeteners of work. But pleasures that are plucked too soon in this way wither and fade very quickly, and leave stains and stings behind. Depend upon it, you will never find pure pleasure when you seek for its essence alone. You will find it wrapped up with your efforts to do that which is right and good in a disinterested way, hoping for no reward. You will come on it when you least expect it, and when all your anxiety is to do your duty. Let your apple blossoms then remain ungathered on the tree, and they will grow into apples in their own good time. You will have the promise of the summer and the autumn. You will have all the advantages of the beauty of the flower and the sweetness of the fruit. Your eye will be gratified with beauty, and your hunger will be satisfied with pleasant and nourishing food. There will be more in the fruit than in the blossom; not only more of the same qualities, but there will also be new qualities brought out. Apple blossoms have little or no smell, but how delightful and refreshing is the smell of a

ripe, juicy apple! Thus, by patient waiting for the full unfolding of your joys and for gathering them at the right time, when they are ready for you and you are ready for them, you will find in them at last a new blessedness, a new quality which you had not expected.

The world of human life is full of promise. It has its flowers before its fruits; its hopes and expectations before its rewards and results. And these promises are no more meant for immediate fulfilment than apple blossoms are meant for being gathered as nosegays. They have to grow and ripen into their proper and full fruition. They are meant to train you and prepare you for their realisation. They hold out to you a beauty and a joy which you go on admiring and longing and striving to attain, until at last you find in them that which you need to make you wiser and better; and the earnest becomes the inheritance, and the foretaste the abundant feast, and the first-fruits the glorious harvest. Hope that is seen is not hope; hope that is realised the moment of hoping is not hope. You must have patience to wait for it, else it does not do you

the good that God meant it to do. It does not bring out all the faculties in you which the training of hope deferred, of a promise slowly and gradually fulfilled, is so well fitted to accomplish.

What is it that has the promise of life in it? The Apostle tells us that it is godliness. And this godliness means literally God-likeness, likeness to God, not in respect of His power and wisdom, but in respect of His goodness and love. You can never have anything approaching the power and wisdom of God; but you may acquire much of His goodness and love. You may come nearer in resemblance to Him in respect of these moral qualities than in regard to the great attributes of His almighty power and omniscient wisdom. But there is one quality which God possesses in the highest degree; and you can show your godliness, your God-likeness, by possessing and exhibiting this quality. That quality is patience. God is infinitely patient. He waits for the perfect ripening of things; He waits for the coming of things in their own proper time and order. He has ever an

unbroken eternity to work in ; and, therefore, He has not the need for haste that the shortness and uncertainty of our life seems to urge upon us at all times. He can bide His time, for a thousand years to Him are but as one day, and one day as a thousand years. He is always deliberate. He waits to be gracious. He sees the end from the beginning, and the fulfilment in the bud ; and all His work is done in the perpetual "now" of Him who is at one and the same time the Alpha and the Omega.

Now godliness is just conformity to this patience of God ; so waiting upon Him that you renew your strength to wait for the fulfilment of His word, and the unfolding of His order. He is teaching you by His great picture-book of Nature to wait, to sow your seed, and wait for the slow ripening of the harvest under the patient heavens. He Himself has long patience as the husbandman of the world's great harvests ; and He would wish you to have the same mind in you, and to tarry the Lord's leisure. He does not give you perfect and full-formed things at

once. He sows the seeds of things that will gradually grow and ripen and bear fruit. He gives buds first, and then fully unfolded blossoms, and then perfect fruit. He gives you first the blade, and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear.

Everything in Nature is developed in this way. Even God's own kingdom of heaven is at first as small as a grain of mustard-seed, and afterwards grows into a mighty tree. Even the preaching of the Gospel and the knowledge of the truth is a slow and gradual process. God has His own times and seasons. There was a fulness of time for which events had to wait. Christ Himself could not do certain things at once; for, as He Himself said, His hour had not yet come. God teaches you by your own experience that only by patient waiting and patient working can you truly possess and enjoy any of the good things of life. They come to you in this way with richer fulness, and you enjoy them with greater zest. They have in themselves the accumulated interest of all your waiting, and of all your hopes and experiences. They are

riper for you, and you yourselves are riper for them. Everything cometh unto him that hath patience to wait for it, is a proverb the truth of which has often been proved. Your godliness enables you to wait like God Himself. His power, working in you, enables you to endure as seeing Him who is the Invisible. His wisdom in you enables you to feel that His will is the best. His law is in your heart. You love His law because you know in your own experience that it is holy, and just, and good, that it is the very thing that regulates your life in the best way. And so in the exercise of godliness you become like God in this manner. Life fulfils to you all that it promises, unfolds to you all its fulness of blessing, in a gradual way from bud to blossom and fruit, in a beautiful order for which you are being prepared all the time.

The apple blossom could never be converted into the apple unless it worked towards that result itself. It works together with the sun and the rain of heaven, and with the help of insects, to fulfil the great respon-

sibility laid upon it of preparing the way and forming the fruit. The apple is just part of the blossom; the blossom itself growing into an apple by living exercise. Unless the apple bloom abides on the tree, and partakes of its life and sap, and all its influences; unless it is busy continually opening its pores to the air, and the sunlight, and the dew, and forming its hues and its richness, it must die and accomplish nothing. And so God promises nothing to idleness and waywardness. If you are to have the fulfilment of the promise of this life and of that which is to come, you must abide in Christ, in Him whose name is the Branch, in whom is stored up for you all the fulness of grace and vital impulse that you need, and you must exercise yourselves unto godliness by continually drawing out of that fulness grace for grace.

The flower that is prematurely plucked from its parent stem speedily perishes and comes to nothing; but the flower that is left on the stem acquires a longer duration of life by being so left, and develops more and more what is in it, until it becomes the enduring

fruit and everlasting seed. And so your life apart from Christ fades like a detached blossom, and all your glory becomes like the flower of the grass. But united to Christ, dwelling in Him by faith, resting in His love, you become partaker of His life, and you bring forth the blossom that has the promise of this life in it, and goes on to develop the fruit that hath the promise of the life to come.

Honey Dew

"*Thy paths drop fatness.*"—PSALM lxv. 11.

WALKING at the beginning of June along the streets, that in the west end of the town are shaded with trees, you will notice upon the dry white pavements great patches of a dark sticky substance, as if some careless person had passed along carrying a vessel of oil, and had spilled some portions of it here and there. In some places the pavement is

covered all over with the dark stains, and in other places they are broken up into separate spots and leaf-like patterns. Such stains are confined to those parts of the pavement that are shaded by particular kinds of trees. They are most abundant under lime-trees; while there are hardly any under the foliage of the elm, the horse-chestnut or the ash-tree. If you look up to the lime-trees under which appear the largest and darkest stains, you will observe that the soft delicate leaves are shining with a wet substance like dew. Every leaf is glistening in the sunshine; and the whole foliage looks as if a shower of rain had just fallen upon it. This is the well-known honey-dew, supposed by some to be naturally produced by the plant itself under certain conditions of the air. But the best authorities say that it is formed by a kind of insect called the Aphis or green-fly, which in hot, dry summers attacks in immense multitudes the foliage of lime-trees and feeds upon its juices. It makes holes in the skin of the leaf by its powerful sucker, and thus opens the door to the flow of the sugary juice, which is often

far more abundant than the fly can use as food, and therefore runs off the leaf and drops upon the ground beneath. It seems to do good to the plant as well as to the insect, for it relieves the tree at a season when it is forming more sap than it is able to make use of for its own purposes—like a process of natural cupping.

This little homely incident in natural history—occurring at your own doors, and under your eye in every walk you take through the town—is a picture illustrating my text. It is a lesson drawn on your pavements so that he who runs may read, teaching you God's large-hearted, liberal way of doing things in Nature, providence and grace. If He gives to one of the very lowest of His creatures, whose structure is so exceedingly simple that it scarcely rises above that of the leaf upon which it feeds, power to make whole trees drop fatness upon the stones of the highway, what will it be when He Himself comes to visit you with the abundance of His grace? The Psalmist wrote his song of praise at a time when a long-

continued drought had broken up, and a timely downpour of refreshing rain had quickened the languid earth, and caused the dry and dusty herbage to unfold in green luxuriance. The soil had been impoverished by the fierce heat, but now the magic raindrops have enriched it everywhere; filling the tender grapes with purple juices, and the plump figs with sugary sweetness, and the black olive-berries with glistening oil. The blessing promised to the tribe of Asher which had in its territory numerous oliveyards and olive-mills—that it should dip its feet in oil —now belongs to the whole land. God's paths everywhere drop fatness. Flowers and fruits spring up in lavish profusion, and the lean earth becomes fat with an abundant harvest.

What a beautiful image of the overflowing fulness of God have we in the text! Not merely is His heart filled with love and His hands with gifts, but His very feet drop fatness. He walks through the woods, and the primroses spring up in myriads, and make the place of His feet glorious. He walks through

the cornfields, and the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves is performed before our eyes, and a few handfuls of seeds spring up into golden sheaves. The natural sinful heart is itself made so straitly that it straitens everything else to its own measure. It makes God in its own image, and believes Him incapable of generous, disinterested love. But that is not the idea of God which the Bible gives. It tells us that we have to do with One whose love passeth knowledge, whose bounty is unmeasured, who does not dole out His goodness to us slowly and exactly as a druggist doles out some fragrant essence drop by drop. He does not give us up to the measure of our own prayers or wishes or thoughts only, but exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. We hear persons saying of some especially great blessing, "It is too much to expect; it is too good to be true." But these common expressions of human limitation cannot be applied to God. We can have no wish that is not overtopped by His ability and willingness to bestow it; we cannot imagine any

good thing but it has been surpassed by a previous provision of His for it. The calf that He kills is always the fatted calf; the robe that He bestows is always the best robe; the joy that He gives is always unspeakable. The water-pots which are to hold our wine He desires to be filled up to the brim; the feast which He spreads is to have many basketfuls of fragments left over at the close.

He put our first parents into the garden of Eden, where there was a profuse supply of every good and beautiful thing to satisfy every sense. He brought the Israelites into a land flowing with milk and honey. In His house continually there is bread enough and to spare. He gives more than is needed; more sunshine than is required to ripen the crops; more blossoms than can set into fruit. The honey-dew is produced by the green-fly in order to attract ants by its sweetness to feed upon it; and those ants in return guard the green-fly that gives them this feast from its numerous insect enemies. But the honey-dew is far more abundant than is required for

this purpose. It overflows the need of the ants, and drips from the foliage in showers upon the ground. The paths of the insect drop fatness far more than the requirements of the case. And all these are examples of the overflowing fulness with which God does things.

But it is in regard to God's unspeakable gift that His overflowing goodness is seen in the most wonderful way. One of the dearest names of our Lord is Christ—which means the Anointed One. God poured upon His head, as the great High Priest of Mankind, His anointing oil in such lavish profusion that it descended to the very skirts of His garments, and dripped to the ground, and made all His paths to drop fatness. Wherever He went, there the riches of His grace abounded. He brought back by His miracles the abundance and glory of the unfallen world. He did things in a royal way. He came not merely to give us new life, but also more abundant life ; not only to change our nature, but to make it wider, richer, fuller. His ministry is a generous ministry. His

redemption is a plenteous redemption. He wants us to come to Him in our spiritual thirst not only for water—without which we cannot live—but also for wine and milk. He offers to us not only the necessaries but also the luxuries of the spiritual life, without money and without price.

Think of what it cost Christ, the Anointed One, to be able to make His paths for us drop fatness. He passed through the agony of Gethsemane, and Gethsemane means an oil-press. There He was pressed between the mill-stones of suffering. And from the oil-press of sorrow He came forth with feet as if dipped in oil, carrying the riches of His grace wherever they tread. Those blessed feet have the soft, tender tread of feet that have been pierced, feet that have been washed with tears and anointed with spikenard for the burial; feet that will lead you gently into paths of sorrow, if it is necessary for your good that you should be brought into them, but that will love best to lead you into ways of pleasantness and paths of peace.

His paths drop fatness; but how often is

the fatness thrown away upon the path? The honey-dew is wasted on the pavement. It soon dries up, or is washed away by the rain, and it benefits no creature. And alas! how often is God's overflowing goodness to us like pouring honey-dew on an insensible stone. The cold, hard heart receives it without gratitude and wastes it without return. The selfish heart cannot appreciate the unselfishness of God's love; the narrow nature cannot take in the boundless extravagance of regard for us which led Him to sacrifice His own Son. Incapable itself of doing generous things, it cannot comprehend the divine generosity. What we should pray for therefore is, that God's goodness would change our stony hearts, and enable them to take in and profit by the honey-dew of the divine love, so that our whole nature might be enlarged and sweetened.

It was a superstitious belief in olden times that any place that was barer and more desolate than other places, had been made so by the footsteps of the Evil One. And you know the curious circles of bare sod that look

as if the grass had been burnt in them, which you sometimes see in the summer pastures, were supposed to be caused by the fairies or good people dancing round them in the moonlight nights. And people imagined that God's power was only seen in destructive forces. "Died by the visitation of God," was the strange verdict which a coroner's inquest passed upon some sudden death by lightning or sunstroke—as if God visited people only to destroy them. But death and destruction are not in God's path; they are in the path only of the evil powers of the world. All God's paths drop fatness.

There are indeed many whose path is blighting and destructive. It is said of the Turks that wherever they tread, the grass withers beneath their footsteps. Do not you add to the number. Seek to earn the tribute so beautifully paid by the American poet Whittier to one whom he loved:

"The blessing of her quiet life,
Fell on us like the dew;
And good thoughts where her footsteps pressed,
Like fairy blossoms grew."

Go forth from Gethsemane with Christ, to heal the wounds of your fellow-creatures with the oil of your peace and gladness. Dip your feet in the oil of Christ's grace, that your paths may drop fatness wherever you go. Imitate your Saviour in the fulness and freeness of your love; and your honey will not be wasted. It will not return unto you void, but will accomplish the good pleasure of God's goodness. It will not fall upon stones but upon warm human hearts. Your paths will be like God's own paths which, when they drop fatness, drop upon the parched pastures of the wilderness, so that the little hills rejoice, and the valleys are covered with flocks. They shout for joy; they also sing.

The Amber Necklace

"*Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while.*"—MARK vi. 31.

You have, I am sure, seen a necklace made of amber, and you greatly admire the round transparent beads, whether of a rich golden yellow or a dark reddish brown. This necklace is now worn merely as a pretty ornament; but in olden times it was used as a charm against the evil-eye, or as a cure for headache or neuralgia, for it was supposed

that there was a secret virtue in the beads. I saw one of these necklaces made in the bazaar at Damascus. It is a very interesting process. The workman takes a lump of rough amber, and puts it to the turning-lathe, and when some fragments are shaved off, and the piece made a little rounder, he puts it away; and takes another rough lump and puts it on the lathe, and after a few turns, shaping it better, he puts this specimen also aside, and takes another; and so on until he has put all the pieces of amber that are meant to form the necklace on the lathe one after another in the same way. When he has done this to the last of the series, he goes back, after several hours, and begins anew with the first, and putting it on the lathe, he finishes it a little better; and this he does with all the beads in turn, putting them a second time to the lathe one after another, and making them more finished, until he has gone over them all. He then goes back the third time, and repeats the same process from the first to the last, and he does this a great many times until all the beads are completed and polished,

and made exactly what he wants them to be for the necklace.

Now a stranger looking on at this curious process may be apt to think the workman a very lazy or fanciful fellow. Why does he not finish at once each bead when he takes it up, before going on to the next one? A wood-turner, when he puts a piece of wood on the lathe, works at it without interruption till he has shaped it into the article he wants, either scoops out a cup, or rounds a knob, or makes an ornamental handle. He does not stop when he has half-finished it, and begin a new piece of wood, for it would be a waste of time and a great trouble to take away the one piece of wood from the lathe and put on another. It is far easier to work at the one article until it is finished. Why, then, is the amber treated differently? For it is not merely one workman who acts in the way I have described—in that case you would have thought it was a peculiarity of the man himself—but every workman in amber acts in precisely the same way. The reason is, that the workman has learned from the best

of all teachers, experience, that the amber will fly to pieces if worked at for a long time continuously. He must, therefore, pause and let it rest. The amber is a great conductor of electricity. If you experiment with one of the pieces immediately after it is taken off the lathe, you will find that it will cause any light substance to fly towards it, even from a distance of an inch or two. It will attract small feathers, or pieces of wool or bits of paper. The motion of the lathe fills it with this wonderful electricity; and if the motion is continued too long, it breaks the amber into fragments. This, then, is the reason why the workman in amber must give his material time to rest and recover itself before he proceeds to work with it again, whereas wood has no such electrical power, and may be worked at safely for any length of time, without any need of a rest.

You can all, I am sure, apply this illustration, and see the force of it. There are natures that are like the wood. They have very little electricity in them. They are what is called phlegmatic. They are dull

and unemotional, and can go on mechanically day after day, and week after week, and year after year, without needing any rest or desiring any change. Their minds are made slow and dull like their employment. They are completely engrossed in it; it is all their world. They have no interest in anything else. Like a horse in a mill, they go round and round, unceasingly grinding away at the same thing, and feeling quite contented and satisfied with their employment. And if such persons do retire from their business after making a competency or a fortune, they feel the want of their old employment, and are miserable without it, for they have no interest in anything else. They want to get back, in order that they may have the feeling of life and usefulness which they used to have. There are many persons who, when they go on a holiday to the country, do not know what to do with themselves. They have not trained themselves to any other pursuit than that by which they earn their daily bread. They have no leisure-recreation. They do not know anything about country objects or care for them; and

no sooner are they away among the green fields or hills than they wish to get back again to their beloved streets. Such wooden persons do not need any change or rest. They may be kept on the lathe till the purpose of their life is finished.

But it is different with other persons, who are eager, sanguine, full of excitement and activity. Such persons, like the amber, have a great deal of vital electricity stored up in them; they put so much of themselves into their work that they would soon wear themselves out and become exhausted and die. And therefore they need frequent rests, pauses of life, alternations of employment, so that they may recover the energy they have expended and begin afresh. The highest kind of work, mental and spiritual, is like making an amber necklace, as compared with making a number of wooden bobbins. It takes it out of a man. The minister who uses his brain, and exercises his nervous system in the Master's work, soon becomes exhausted. If he is truly devoted, if he sympathises with all his heart with the sick and the sorrowful, and

visits the homes of the dying and the bereaved with the fellow-feeling of a loving brother, virtue goes out of him, and leaves him weak and nervous and depressed. That was the case with the work in which our Lord and His disciples were engaged. It was the noblest and highest work on earth. It was doing good to the souls and bodies of men ; and such work was most exhausting. We read that on one occasion Jesus fell sound asleep when he was taken by the disciples into their boat, worn-out with His labours. And yet the record of that day's toil does not astonish us because of its amount. Many men do far more work each day, and are not a bit tired. But it was not the extensiveness but the intensiveness of Christ's work that exhausted Him. He gave Himself in all His words and actions. He put His whole being into them. "The words that I speak unto you," He said, "they are spirit and they are life." And therefore it was that He said to His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while."

Our Saviour never drove His own over-

tired faculties, and He was most considerate too of His disciples. He knew the frailty of their frames, the feebleness of their minds. He gave them light according to the opening of their eyes, and appointed them tasks as they were fit to perform them. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"—was true of every stage of their progress. He told them to let the morrow take care of itself, and merely to meet the evils of the present day. He took them off the lathe every now and then, when He gave them a turn or two and made them more fit for His purposes. When many were coming and going and they had no leisure so much as to eat, He took them aside from the busy crowd into a lonely spot, that they might there recover the repose of their spirits, agitated by recent trying events, and be free to meditate upon the things they had seen and heard—and prepare for their future work.

And so Jesus deals with you with equal tenderness and consideration. He gives you two feet, that, in walking, the one may rest

while the other is in motion; two ventricles to your heart, that one may repose while the other is beating; two hemispheres to your brain, that the one may cease from thinking while the other is active. And so in your life, He gives you periods of rest and activity —sleep and toil. He places you on the wheel of active duty, that your nature may be shaped and smoothed and polished by the exercise. He takes you off the wheel, and lets you rest, that in returning and rest you may be saved, in quietness and confidence may be your strength. He will not allow fatigue to become so great as to cause you loss of energy, or suffer excitement to reach such a height as to depress your spirits by a dull reaction and unfit you for repose. By a judicious alternation of work and rest, He prepares you for becoming shining gems, meant for His breastplate or His crown, on the day that He maketh up His jewels. And it is for you to improve aright the advantages of labour and rest—to realise that both are good for you—that you need both in order to fulfil God's plan for your life. When you

work, put your whole soul into it, that you may do it well, seeking to do all things not as unto men but as unto the Lord. When you rest, let your whole being share in it, so that the activity of your hours of duty may be converted into a deeper repose of thought and feeling. Let the electricity developed in your hours of work quicken your soul to a fuller enjoyment of rest.

The amber, when it has been turned rapidly for a while upon the lathe, has the motion stored up in it and converted into electricity, and it can attract by this strange power small objects that are beside it. If the amber were always at rest, it would not have this wonderful power given to it, and would be like a mere piece of wood. And so it is not the idle who enjoy leisure, but those who have been busy. Those who have no work to do never know what it is to have true rest. But the sleep and the rest of a labouring man are sweet. His work has developed an energy and brightness in him, which enable him thoroughly to enjoy his leisure moments, and to make them attractive not only to himself

but to others. Your mind and heart require to be quickened and brightened, and have a sharp edge given to them by good honest work, in order to realise the beauties of Nature and the charms of society. If you bring a dull, listless mood to them, caused by previous idleness, they only deepen your dulness and ennui. It is a striking fact of common experience that you cannot sleep without strength. People think that when they are utterly exhausted they will sleep; but you may be too tired, too worn-out to sleep. A sick person cannot sleep because he has not enough strength; and one of the first signs of returning health and strength is the ability to sleep. "If he sleep, he shall do well." And so with rest and leisure. You cannot have leisure if your whole life is idle; you cannot have rest if you have not previously worked. That is God's law, that in the sweat of your face you must earn every blessing, even the blessing of being idle with advantage and enjoyment. The disciples could not have enjoyed going aside into a desert place, unless they had previously been hard at work in the

crowded villages of Galilee. That desert place would have been to them intolerable, a blank vacuity, as empty and dreary as their own minds. The charm of life consists in its contrasts. The desert is delightful as contrasted with the city, and rest as contrasted with labour. But, quickened and inspired by their previous hours of duty well fulfilled, the rest of the disciples was sweet because of their work, and the desert place was full of rich blessings because of the busy villages through which they had passed into it.

Solomon was one of the wisest men that ever lived; and when engaged in building the Temple, he wanted to get as much good work out of his workmen as possible; and the plan he adopted for this end showed his wisdom. He had 30,000 men in his employment, and he sent them, we are told, ten thousand at a time, for a month to the mountains of Lebanon, to hew down the great cedars and quarry the beautiful white marbles for which the mountains were famous. They were to work one month among the mountains and two months at home. He knew the immense

advantage of change of employment and change of air and scene; and he was satisfied that they would do their two months' work at home far better, if they had a kind of holiday-work for a month away from home. Among the mountains of Lebanon they would breathe fresh air, see grand sights, inhale the fragrance of the cedar forests, which had a wonderful healing power in them; and with new strength and vigour, inspired by their new surroundings, they would prepare in one month sufficient materials to last them for their work—in shaping the walls and partitions and roofs of the Temple—during their two months' residence in the city.

In former times, in the Highlands of our own country, the people regularly every summer left their homes in the valley, and went to live three or four months in the sheilings among the mountains. And during these three or four months, they prepared, under the stimulus of the purer air and healthier and grander surroundings, enough cheese and butter to last them during the rest of the year, and to enable them to pay the

rent of their holdings down in the valley. They enjoyed the freedom and novelty of this kind of life immensely; and looked forward to it every year with the greatest eagerness. This custom gave rise to the most beautiful and inspiring songs of the people, and made them healthier and happier than they would otherwise have been.

And so should it be with our holidays. It was to the mountains that Solomon sent his workmen; it was to the desert that Christ sent His disciples. And these arrangements suggest to us that all seasons of rest should be sought among the works of God in Nature, rather than among the works of man in the city. Mountain solitudes were the places which King Solomon himself liked best in spite of all his grandeur, for he built a house in the forest of Lebanon, like the Balmoral Castle of our own beloved Queen among the Cairngorm hills—where he could retire from the cares of the State, and in the genial study of God's works recover the tone of his spirit. The desert was the special haunt of Christ, where He loved to pour out His soul in

prayer and communion alone with God under the wide sky. And Solomon and Christ both wanted their workmen to experience the same soothing and elevating influences which they themselves had realised in these solitudes of Nature. They were both engaged in the same work. The workmen of Solomon were employed in building the earthly temple—the shadow of the spiritual. The disciples were engaged in building the house of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. They were both preparing, by their short sojourn in the mountains and in the desert, materials with which to build for a longer period a heavenly house amid the busy haunts of men; and just in proportion as they wisely improved the hours of leisure, could they successfully fill up the days of labour. And on this principle the more we improve the weekly day of rest which comes regularly to all of us—which is God's wise ordinance, the expression of His holy and perfect will for men; the more we spend the Sabbath, not as a day paid to God as a kind of quit-rent for the worldly or careless employment of the rest

of our time, but as a short period of preparing materials to build up a holy temple, in which to worship and serve God during the whole week; the more we do this, the more will the Sabbath be a delight to us, and a true rest and variety to our life.

But mere ceasing from work is not rest; for while one part of your nature may be reposing, the other may be more disturbed than ever. Your hands may cease from toil, but your minds may be full of care and anxiety. But Jesus wants you to have true rest, rest of body and mind. And He knows that you can only have that in Himself and with Himself. He said to the disciples not "go" but "come" ye yourselves into a desert place and rest a while. He wanted them to go with Himself. He, too, needed rest; and the disciples could not get rest apart from Him. The desert place would indeed have been desert without Him. He would accompany them into the solitude, and His presence would people it. Never was Eden, when God talked with our unfallen first parents among the trees of the garden;

never was the wilderness, when the pillar of cloud and fire rested over the tents of the Israelites, more filled with heaven than was the desert place where Jesus was with His disciples. The disciples would go back to their work in the crowds of life, refreshed and strengthened by this communion with God in the solitude of Nature. Visions and hopes would come to them to elevate their minds and illumine their path. Their life would be like a streamlet that rises high among the lonely mountains, and carries the blessings of the clouds that distil into its sources down to the dwellings of men. And "tasks in hours of insight willed, in hours of gloom would be fulfilled."

And you need frequent opportunities of being alone with God. The world is too much with you, even the youngest of you. You need often to leave it behind and go to the desert place. Take Jesus with you into every solitude; and then you will go down from Lebanon with the strength of the everlasting hills, which is His, in you; you will return from the desert, with your garments

smelling of the myrrh and cassia, the fragrant plants that grow in the desert; with your minds enlarged, and your hearts refreshed, nerved, and braced, to carry on your work—God's work, Christ's work—at home. Your home life and your Church life will be enriched by your sojourn on Lebanon and your retreat in the desert.

It was but for a month that Solomon sent his workmen to the mountains; it was but "for a while" that Jesus bade His disciples go with Him into the desert place. Such seasons of rest and change are only temporary: and we are apt at first to be sorry that they are soon over. We do not want to go back so quickly from the desert to the things of life. We are tempted to say when we are on the mountains: "It is good for us to be here; let us build here our tabernacle, and dwell as long as possible apart from the cares and worries that await us in the distant city." But the desert is not our home; the mountain is only the place in which we are to hew the timber and quarry the stones for the building of the living temple in the busy streets,

where God has appointed our lot and our work. And, therefore, instead of bringing back with us a selfish, discontented, indolent spirit, and so making a curse of what God meant for a blessing, let us take back with us the wider sky of the desert, and the freer and the grander outlook of the mountains in our souls. And, like Moses and Jesus when they descended from the breezy heights to the multitude in the plain, let our faces shine with the light of these loftier regions; and so let us cheer those who have been chained during our absence to their dull tasks, and have had no season of rest or change such as we have had. And our holiday, amid such beautiful and inspiring surroundings, will not only prepare us for doing our work better, but will also be a foretaste of the eternal rest that remaineth to the people of God.

A Basket of Summer Fruit

"Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit."
AMOS viii. 1.

WHEN God would give Israel warning of the doom that was to befall it, He chose as His messenger, not one who was educated in the school of the prophets, or brought up among the refinements of court or city life, but Amos, the simple herdsman of Tekoa. This man belonged to the very humblest walk of life. He was a farm

servant, whose business it was to take care of the sheep and goats that browsed upon the hills of Judah. He had no education; he was simply a child of Nature; but he had a keen, observant eye, and Nature taught him by long familiarity with her loneliest recesses many of her deepest secrets. When he was sent by God to denounce the idolatry and wickedness of the luxurious priests and nobles of Israel, he appeared in their grand palaces and temples fresh from the wilderness, with the free air of the hills about him. His language, rough and direct, was full of the rustic imagery borrowed from the pastoral scenes in which his life was spent. The objects with which he was familiar furnished him with illustrations that were wonderfully apt and graphic. On one special occasion there appeared to him in a dream of the night a vision, and God said to him, "Amos, what seest thou?" and Amos replied, "A basket of summer fruit."

"What a beautiful vision!" you say. Could anything be more delightful than the sight of a basket of ripe fruit; especially

in the hot days of summer, with the rich bloom upon each rounded luscious plum and grape, so cool, so juicy, so tempting! But it was not a vision of beauty that the prophet beheld, but a vision of doom. It was given not for the purpose of symbolising pleasant and happy things, but in order to convey a dreadful lesson. The basket of summer fruit was intended to teach, by its ripeness and readiness to be eaten, that so the Israelites were ripe and ready for destruction. "Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more." And the kind of fruit that filled the basket was peculiarly suited to teach that lesson. There are some fruits that take a long time reaching the perfection of maturity, even after they have been gathered. Pears, and apples, and oranges, that look as if they were quite ripe, can be kept for weeks after they have been pulled off the tree, and sent long distances without any injury. The pears that you usually eat come from France, and the apples from America, and the oranges from Spain.

These fine fruits die slowly. But there are other fruits, tender and thin-skinned, that begin to decay the moment they are plucked. Even in the short time taken to remove them from the place where they grow to the table, they lose some of that sweet flavour which they possess when they are hanging on the tree. The sooner plums, and figs, and peaches, and strawberries are eaten after they are gathered the better. They die whenever they are separated from the parent stalk, and every moment in their progressive dying is marked by the loss of that essence which makes fruit delicious, and in a short time they become corrupt and unwholesome.

Now the fruit in the basket that appeared in vision to Amos must have been of this fugitive kind; for it was upon this quality which they possessed that the significance of the parable hung. We may be sure that it was not apples, or oranges, or pomegranates, which could last a long time fresh and sweet after they were gathered before they were eaten. It must have been a basket of ripe figs that the prophet saw. There are several

reasons that make us think so. The fig is the most common and abundant summer fruit of Palestine; and when the dark grains of its juicy richness show through its transparent purple skin, it is fully ripe and must be eaten at once, else it quickly spoils. It therefore supplied a suitable image for the prophet's use. And what gave it an additional appropriateness was the fact that the fig is never employed in the Bible in a good sense. It is always associated with evil. It was by its leaves that our first parents tried to hide the shame of their nakedness after the fall. Our Lord spoke a parable about a barren fig-tree, and withered up from the roots the fig-tree on which He found nothing but leaves. He also used the fig-tree as a sign of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the end of the world. "Now learn a parable of the fig-tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors."

But there is a peculiar kind of fig found

in Palestine, called the mulberry or sycamore fig, which in all likelihood was the summer fruit which Amos saw in vision. This fruit is the produce of a tree called the sycamore, whose leaves are like those of the mulberry, and whose fruit is exactly like the fig in shape and smell and internal structure. The tree is as large as a walnut-tree, has low, wide-spreading branches, and affords a delightful shade, for which reason it is usually planted by the wayside. Zaccheus, you remember, climbed one of these trees in order to see Jesus as He passed by. The fruit is very extraordinary. It is, as I have said, exactly like a fig; but it grows, not from the ends of branches like nearly all other fruit, but directly from the trunk of the tree on little sprigs, forming clusters like grapes. When quite ripe it is soft, watery, somewhat sweet, with a slight aromatic taste, and is much prized by the poor, to whom it supplies a large part of their food in summer. Amos called himself "a gatherer of sycamore fruit." His employment was not only to herd sheep and cattle, but also to look after the syca-

more-trees, which were so valuable that David appointed for them in his kingdom a special overseer. In order to produce fruit, the part of the tree where it buds requires to have a cut or wound made in it; for, unless this is done, the tree will be barren. From the wound or opening made in this way a bud springs up, which grows and forms the fruit. Then further, when the fruit is about to be ripe, it requires to be punctured, or to have what is called its "eye" removed by a sharp instrument. The fruit is infested invariably with an insect whose presence makes it unpleasant to the taste. But when the "eye" or top is cut off the insect escapes, and the fig then becomes sweet and eatable. The operation is only performed on fruits that are to be eaten within twenty-four hours. Amos had to do all these things; not merely to gather the fruit when it was ripe, but to perform the operations by which the fruit was produced and made serviceable.

The principal work of Amos in the summer time being thus connected with the sycamore fig, there is every probability that it was the

summer fruit that appeared to him in vision. God chose the object with which he was most familiar to give him a moral lesson for Israel; just as he chose the star to guide the Wise Men to Christ, and made use of the fishermen's net to teach the fishermen of Galilee to become fishers of men. And no other fruit that we know of could teach the lesson which Amos had to convey to the people of Israel so well as the sycamore fig. God had dealt with His people as the dresser of the vineyard in the parable dealt with his barren fig-tree. He digged about them, changed the soil in which they grew, planted them in different circumstances. He wounded them with sore punishments and afflictions, pruned them with the chastisements of His providence, as the gatherer of sycamore fruit treats the object of his care, so that they might bring forth fruit unto holiness, and that the fruit might be abundant and good and palatable. But all His grievous and gracious dealings with them proved in vain. They turned their backs upon God and went after the idolatries of the heathen. The revolted

northern kingdom of Israel had set up the worship of the golden calf of Egypt in Bethel, where God had appeared unto Jacob, and which the patriarch said was none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven; and the priests of Jehovah ministered at an altar raised to this debasing worship. They persisted in this wickedness in spite of every remonstrance and warning. Nothing now remained, therefore, but to pronounce the sentence of doom. And as Jesus chose a barren fig-tree to be the symbol of the destruction that was to overtake the Jews of His time, because they did not fulfil God's design; so God chose a basket of sycamore figs to be a picture of the speedy punishment that was to come upon the people of Israel in the time of Amos.

The prophet was commanded to go to the sanctuary of Bethel, and to speak face to face to the chief priest Amaziah, who was the ringleader in the calf-worship of Jeroboam. He was to act his parable, and take with him a basketful of sycamore figs which he had gathered from the wayside trees as he went

along, and say that as these figs were fully ripe and ready to be eaten, so the idolaters of Bethel were fully ripe in wickedness, and ready to be devoured by their enemies and carried away to the land of captivity. It was the same image which Isaiah had previously used to picture the fate of the same people. He said that Ephraim should be "as the hasty fruit before the summer, which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand, he eateth it up." You thus see that the only thing about the fruit that was used to point a moral, was its ripeness and readiness to be eaten; not its abundance, its beauty, its sweetness, its nourishing qualities, but the one single fact that it had reached that stage of maturity when it must be eaten at once, else it will rot and perish. Everything else about the fruit was ignored, and only this one point was insisted upon. The Israelites were not compared to the goodness, the beauty, or the value of the fruit, but simply to its fugacious quality. As it was ripe to be eaten, so the people of Israel were ripe to be destroyed. It is the evil in man

that makes the evil in things. He perverts the good uses of Nature to evil uses; and makes what ought to be prophecies of blessing in creation to be prophecies of ruin. It was because Israel was wicked that Amos saw in the basket of ripe figs, not an image of beauty and blessedness, but an image of destruction. That which ought to have spoken to him of the goodness of God, only spoke to him of His wrath and vengeance.

Our Lord based His parable of the wicked husbandmen upon the vision of Amos. There can be little doubt that He had it before His mind at the time. When the lord of the vineyard required the fruits of it from the cultivators, they took the servants whom he sent for the purpose, and beat one and killed another, and stoned another. This, as history tells us, was the way in which the calf-worshippers of Bethel treated Amos when he declared to them the message of the Lord. Amaziah, the chief priest, became his enemy, and beat him and subjected him to indignity, because he dared to prophesy against the royal house of Israel, and against the worship of

the altar of Bethel. And as Amos foretold the fall of the kingdom of Israel and the destruction of the altar of Bethel, so the Jews, in answer to our Lord's question, "When the lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh what will he do with these husbandmen?" replied, "He will miserably destroy these wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their season." Out of their own mouth they were condemned.

Fruit is the end and the reward of labour. It ought to give complete happiness and satisfaction; it ought to last for many a long day. But in the text the vanity of it is the only feature that is presented to us. The end and object of the basket of summer fruit in the prophet's vision, as I have said, is to be eaten and destroyed at once. And so it is with all the fruit of sin. Its perishableness is its most conspicuous character. It is produced only to be destroyed. Well may the Apostle ask the Roman Christians in their former pagan state, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?

for the end of those things is death." What fruit had the idolaters of Bethel of their degrading worship? The kingdom of Israel which Jeroboam founded, and against which Amos uttered his most terrible prophecies, was indeed shortlived. It originated in schism, alienation from God and alienation from man—separation from the one divine Father and from the brethren. Its whole history was full of trouble. Not one of its kings was a great or good man. Separated by their political independence from the centre of the national worship in Jerusalem, its subjects set up a rival altar in Bethel; and their political disaffection led the way to national apostasy, and finally to national ruin. The Assyrians came and carried away their place and nation, and they disappeared for ever. For them there was no return from captivity. They perished like the summer fruit, which was the emblem of their state.

And so it is with all the workers of iniquity. They see the vision of the basket of summer fruit, and it tempts them with its beauty and its satisfyingness. Sin promises

delicious fruit. And the sinner goes on in sin, expecting to obtain by it his heart's desire. But there is a prophetic voice which warns him that the only quality of the fruit for which he has sinned is its transitoriness. He has premonitions all along of its unsatisfyingness, and when he comes to pluck it as it hangs ripe and tempting among the leaves upon the wall, and partakes of it in its maturity, he finds it nauseous dust and ashes. No sooner does he enjoy it than it perishes. The sycamore fruit symbolises in a striking way the nature and the end of the fruit of sin. It is produced and perfected in an abnormal, unnatural way, by artificial methods. Other fruit is the free product of its tree, and it ripens spontaneously. But the sycamore fruit originates in a wound and is ripened by a wound. And so it is with the fruit of sin. It is a departure from the living God; it is a breach of His holy law. It begins in an excision, and it ends in punishment. God afflicts it every moment, and the end of these things is death.

How different is it with that fruit which is

unto holiness, and whose end is everlasting life, that fruit whose most conspicuous quality is its enduringness! The essence of the peaceable fruits of righteousness does not vanish, like that of the fruit of sin, the moment they are plucked. These fruits retain the capacity for richness, the reserve of freshness they got from the sun-fed tree on which they grew. No reaction sets in after their severance from the life-giving stem; they are still in magnetic correspondence with all the powers of God's great world; they share the life of earth and heaven; they have the sunshine of heavenly love in their veins and the dew of grace in their cells. They go on ripening more and more, maturing and increasing their sweetness: and in the end satisfying more than in the beginning. The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance—is, indeed, a basket of summer fruit reddened by the fire of a July sun, and growing under the cool, green, unfading leaves on the highest branches nearest heaven. This fruit the Gospel of Jesus Christ holds out as a

luscious feast within reach of all to enjoy. This is a prophetic vision, of which all the kings and prophets and godly men of old in the Bible have told, which each of us can realise in our own experience. And as the Eastern seller of fresh, ripe figs proclaims his recognition of their true excellence by the well-known cry, "In the name of the prophet, figs," so may we, in the name of the Lord, proclaim the true, enduring merit of the products of that tree of life which bears its fruit in its season, and whose leaf also shall not wither. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. Oh, fear the Lord, ye His saints, for there is no want to them that fear Him."

Every Tree of the Garden

"*Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.*"—GENESIS ii. 16.

You are apt to think that God dealt with our first parents in a narrow and grudging spirit. Satan puts this idea into your minds, as he put it into the mind of Adam and Eve. He made our first parents think more of the one tree that was forbidden than of all the other trees that dropped their rich fruits into their lap; and the poison of the

thought worked in their minds, until the forbidding of what seemed a small indulgence was magnified into a great grievance, and they came to think of God as harsh and unjust to them, and of themselves as being wronged and injured. But the answer of Eve to the Tempter was the true answer—"We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden." Every tree that was pleasant to the sight, or good for food, or capable of yielding instruction, grew up freely before them, and made the Garden of Eden a scene of exquisite beauty and delight. And young people can fully understand what it is to be allowed to roam through a great garden, full of all kinds of lovely flowers and ripe fruits, with perfect liberty to pluck and eat what they like. It is a happiness that comes very seldom in real life and only to a favoured few. God wished our first parents to be perfectly at home in the lovely spot in which He had placed them, and to use all its things without any feeling of restraint. He wished them to have a large and varied life. He had given them a large nature, with wants of body, mind, and soul,

which only a large world could satisfy. And therefore He placed them in a scene where there was everything to gratify every bodily appetite and mental taste and spiritual desire ; and only one thing was prohibited, the eating of the forbidden fruit, which would have done them harm if they had been allowed to eat it.

Man, because of the greatness of his nature, is a creature of many wants. Even his body—the lowest part of him—requires a great variety of food to make it strong and healthy. The beasts of the earth are contented with one kind of food only, because their natures are limited. The silkworm feeds only upon the leaves of the mulberry-tree ; and a particular butterfly confines itself to the common nettle ; and caterpillars accustomed to one kind of leaf have been known to die rather than eat of another. Sheep and cattle feed contentedly upon the same kind of grass day after day without requiring any change. But it is different with man. He needs a great variety of food for the support of his body. He needs the fruit of

a great many different kinds of trees and plants to keep him in healthy and vigorous life. Numerous cases have been recorded of persons having died of starvation by being kept to one kind of food. Fifty years ago a German State used to put its criminals to death by giving them nothing but veal and red wine. Sailors during long voyages, having only salt meat and no fresh fruits and vegetables, are apt to take a terrible disease called scurvy. Doctors have made experiments upon themselves by trying to live entirely upon the essences of food—upon those substances from which all our structures are directly formed, and they have found that they will not sustain life if they are employed alone. Parents are apt to complain of the dislike which a long continuance of one article of diet day after day creates in their children, as a mere caprice, or the result of a taste that is too nice and dainty; but it is in reality a law of Nature, arising from the fact that every human being requires a variety of food, if the body is to be kept up in health and strength. Persons tire very soon even of the best and most

nourishing food; and if persisted in, it will destroy appetite and injure health.

In olden times, when salmon was a common article of food instead of a luxury as it is now, Scottish servants in big houses used to make a bargain when they were engaged, that they were not to get salmon oftener than three times a week. And sick persons and invalids are fickle and wayward in their taste for food, because Nature prompts them to seek a constant variety, in order that they may be restored to health. In the case of the strongest, this variety must be supplied not by chemical combinations but by the living action of Nature; so that through your food, the sunshine and the air of heaven and the juices of the earth which it has imbibed, may glow in your veins and animate your nerves. And therefore Nature opens her hand and pours out to you the resources of every land and every sea; and the commerce of the nations supplies you with the varied products of all the zones and climates of the world. Your bread is not restricted to one kind of corn; it is made up of no less than six kinds,

each with different qualities—to make it more palatable and nutritious and to suit different circumstances. You have wheat and oats and barley and rye and rice and maize to furnish your table. There are roots to nourish you with their starch and sugar and gluten, and fruits to tempt you with their luscious sweetness and their cool, refreshing juices. Nature invites you to partake freely of all that rich variety of food, for she wishes you to have a wide and vigorous life, partaking of all the variety of the world.

And just as God gives you such a rich variety of food for your bodies, so He gives you an equally rich variety of food for your minds and souls. The mind becomes dwarfed and stunted if it is confined to one kind of reading, or one class of subjects; just as surely as the body becomes unhealthy if confined to one kind of meat. You should study a great variety of subjects, and read a great variety of books, poetry as well as history, works of imagination as well as works of science and philosophy, books of amusement as well as books of religion. Of

every tree of the intellectual garden that is good for food and pleasant to the eye, and fitted to make you wise, you may freely eat. While you are to learn one subject well, you ought to seek to know something of every subject, so that you may take a wide and intelligent interest in the vast range of thought and in the great work of the world. If you lived upon one kind of knowledge alone, you would become narrow-minded and prejudiced to suit it, just as the caterpillar that lives upon one kind of leaf becomes green like it.

And as with your mind, so with your soul. The Gospel bids you be single-eyed, but not one-eyed. Many people think that to be single-eyed is to confine yourself to one object; to love only one thing. Many imagine that to be religious you must think only of spiritual things, and read the Bible only, and take an interest in nothing but in the things of heaven and eternity. They reduce the field of sacred knowledge and experience to those things only which they deem necessary to salvation. But God says that of all the

trees of the soul's garden which He has planted expressly for you, you may freely eat. Your religion was given to you by God for the very purpose of enlarging your heart, and widening your sphere of interest and enjoyment; for opening your eyes and bringing back to you the fresh charm of God's wide world. The words of a Roman poet, who had a large sympathetic heart, have been often quoted, "Nothing human is foreign to me." And so to the Christian, nothing that God has made should be foreign. You should take an interest in everything that belongs to man's life, and to the world of Nature around you. The wisdom from above comprehends everything that can furnish your understanding, and fill your soul with food suited to its great capacities. Solomon's wisdom included a knowledge of, and an interest in, everything that belonged to God's great world, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grew out of the wall. And God wishes you to cultivate a wisdom as large and varied. The love of God in the heart is not like water filling a glass, to the exclusion of

everything else, but like light filling a room, which does not displace anything, but illumines and beautifies everything in it. The love of God in your heart is consistent with the love of everything that is pure and innocent and beautiful and instructive. It makes everything else more delightful and satisfying. With one thing only it cannot dwell, and that is sin. For sin is like darkness; light cannot dwell with darkness, and sin cannot dwell with the love of God, for if you love God, you cannot love sin.

Of every tree in the garden you may freely eat, with the exception only of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To eat of it would be to poison your soul; and therefore God draws a fence around it, and would fain prevent your plucking its tempting fruit. Remember what happened to our first parents when they disregarded God's word, and ate of the forbidden fruit. Their hearts instead of being enlarged became contracted; their horizon instead of being widened became narrowed. They were left in the garden for a while after they sinned; but their sin took

all the enjoyment and all the beauty out of its objects. Eden became a gloomy prison to them. Norfolk Island in the far Pacific ocean was a most lovely place, full of all kinds of beautiful trees and splendid flowers, but it was made a convict settlement, and it became a hell upon earth. At last the convicts were removed, and their place was supplied by the Pitcairn Islanders, the descendants of the mutineers of the *Bounty*, good, simple, pious people, brought up in the fear of the Lord, and it became again a Paradise. And so the eating of the forbidden fruit has destroyed the beauty and gladness of the world—as throwing a stone into the water destroys the reflected image of the landscape on the calm bosom of a stream; but obedience to the commandments of God will bring back the lost Eden. Satan decks with wonderful beauty the lie with which he tempts you; makes the forbidden tree more satisfying and desirable than all the other trees in the garden. But God would fain prevent the misery that is sure to come when, after having eaten the forbidden fruit, your

eyes are opened, and you realise the folly of your conduct and the truth of God's word. The religion of Jesus forbids nothing that is truly for your good. Walking with Christ you are walking at perfect liberty. Everywhere you may go in and out by Christ, the living door, with a blessed sense of freedom and enlargement, and find pasture —find what will truly satisfy and delight you.

God is not jealous of your happiness. He does not grudge you all the pure enjoyments of which your nature is capable. It is only false, sinful pleasures that are truly injurious to you, that waste your powers of enjoyment and in the end destroy your life. It is only such sinful pleasures that He prohibits. He has made the world so beautiful and rich for the very purpose of making you happy; and it is because He wants you to be truly happy, to have enjoyments which will leave no stains or stings behind, that He marks out so clearly and distinctly everywhere the forbidden tree. He makes the flaming sword of Eden still to turn every way, to scorch you back if you go to the

right hand or to the left, or deviate in the least degree from the strait and narrow track, and so to keep you in the way of the tree of life. He would do you good and not harm all the days of your life ; and for this purpose He sent you the unspeakable gift of His own Son, that having Him, you may have all things in Him : the true enjoyment and use of life, victory over sin and death, and at last an abundant entrance into God's everlasting paradise above.

Mimicry

"*And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him.*"—GENESIS xxvii. 22, 23.

ONE of the strangest chapters of natural history is that which tells you about the disguises of animals. There are among all kinds of creatures, and especially among insects, numerous examples of what is called mimicry—that is, the imitation of one creature in its form or colour, or any other peculiarity, by another of an entirely different kind.

Very often a timid, harmless animal puts on the appearance of a fierce and dangerous one, armed with sting or poison fang, in order to be protected from its enemies. And very often a poor helpless creature assumes the shape, and hue, and habits of a creature that has got rich resources of its own, in order that it may get the benefit of its help and food. You know how the cuckoo lays an egg that resembles in colour the eggs of the bird in whose nest it places it, in order that it may be hatched by that bird, and the young cuckoo may enjoy the attentions and the up-bringing of its foster-parent. There is a kind of bee that makes no nest for itself, but, like the cuckoo, enters the nest of other bees, and lays its eggs there, to be reared at the expense of the owner. It looks exactly like the hive and honey-making bee, and doubtless in this way it is not found out by those of whom it takes advantage. In the nests of ants are often found blind beetles, so remarkably like the ants upon whose labour they live, that it is exceedingly difficult to detect them.

Now, we should call these cases of mimicry

impostures and deceptions did they occur in the human world. But there is no reason or moral sense among these creatures. They are simply the slaves of circumstances; they put on these deceitful appearances because it is part of their nature, and they are made so. But it is widely different in the world of man, whom God has made in His own image, and gifted with the wondrous faculty of reason and choice. When he puts on such disguises, and practises such deceptions, he becomes guilty of sin, and draws down upon him the wrath of God, and the condemnation of all true and honest men.

Jacob was a deceiver, putting on the appearance of his brother Esau, for the very purpose of deceiving his father; and you must all feel that he was acting in this a most unworthy part. His mother clothed him with the dress of Esau, and put upon his smooth hands the thin skin of the Angora goat, with its black silk-like hair, so as to resemble the hairy hands of Esau; and giving him a dish of venison such as his father loved, brought him into the presence of Isaac that

he might take him for Esau, and give him the blessing of the first-born. Isaac was almost blind and deaf with old age, and could not penetrate the fraud that was practised upon him. He was, however, suspicious that, though the dress and the hands were those of Esau, the voice was the voice of Jacob ; and it was only when he smelt his raiment, the hunter's coat, which had caught and kept the pungent fragrance of the desert plants, through which Esau had chased the game, that he was reassured, and gave Jacob the blessing which he desired. But that blessing was dearly purchased. The deceit of Jacob, aided by his mother, brought hatred and alienation into the family. Esau, full of rage, wished to kill his brother for what he had done ; and Jacob had to flee to a distant and strange land, and be a fugitive and a slave there, and he never saw his mother again. God punished him for his sin in the line of his sin. He who cheated was himself cheated, in the matter of his wages, and in the matter of his wives. His own children inflicted on their father the wrongs which he had inflicted

upon his brother. As he deceived his blind old father by the coat of Esau, so he himself was deceived by the coat of Joseph dipped in blood, which the wicked brothers brought to him, saying that a wild beast had destroyed his son; and he was left for years to mourn deeply for Joseph, thinking him dead, while all the time he was living. Thus what he did to his father was done to himself.

Now, doubtless you condemn severely the conduct of Jacob; but the sin of which he was guilty is by no means rare in our own day. Deception is often practised among us. What is every hypocrite but one who acts the part of Jacob, puts on the form of religion in order to deceive God and his fellow-men, and thus get the blessings of religion without earning or deserving them? How many people put on the appearance of devotion in order to get God to bless them, as Jacob wanted his father to bless him! How many people wish to get credit for good actions that are done by others, and claim the rewards that belong to those who are overlooked! I am afraid that there is as much pretence and deception

among us as there is of mimicry among animals. Even young people have their own hypocrisies, and imitations of virtue and goodness, and acted falsehoods. I need not tell you that all such disguises are vain and foolish. God cannot be deceived as Isaac was. God looks not at the appearance, but at the heart. He searches the heart and tries the reins ; and He sees the real character beneath the cloak of hypocrisy, the true face behind the hollow mask ; and He marks each deception with His strongest hatred, and punishes it with His severest punishment.

Nothing hardens the heart so much as such deception, pretending to be what you are not in order to get what you have not deserved. It makes your life an acted lie, and every holy and blessed feeling a mere sham and make-believe ; and thus nothing becomes real or true to you. You walk in a vain show, and have no true hold either of this life or of the next. And even by your fellow-creatures such deception is easily detected and severely punished. Jacob may dress like Esau, and may try to personate him; but the voice is still

Jacob's, and the whole acting and outcome is Jacob's. Dogs and children are said to be good judges of character, just because of the simplicity of their nature. They know their friends at once ; and no pretensions can cheat them in regard to those whom they can trust. And so the true character of the religious deceiver produces its own proper effect upon the minds of all simple-minded persons who come into contact with him, however much he may try to hide it under the robe of sanctimoniousness. And there is nothing that people hate and despise so much as hypocrisy. The most terrible words in the Bible were uttered by our Saviour against the Pharisees, who wanted to get the blessing of God and the praise of man on false pretences, by their sounding, ostentatious piety ; which He said was a whited sepulchre, without fair and beautiful in all its marble brightness, but within full of dead men's bones.

In the animal world, it is weak, helpless creatures alone that put on the appearance of other stronger creatures, in order to get their advantages. They have no stability or re-

sources of their own. And so among human beings, the very fact that you imitate another person shows that you are a poor, weak creature, without any character of your own. You sink your personality, and consent to be a nobody. Each of you bears the image of God in your own special individuality, in a way which no other person bears it; and instead of being satisfied with being yourselves, instead of wearing the image which God saw it best that you should wear, you ape the image of another for whom God meant an entirely different life and experience. The old poets of Greece and Rome often spoke of a strange class of beings called fauns. They seemed to be men, but when examined closely they were found to be only animals that had the form of men. They had no cares or sorrows or toils such as human beings have, because they were beneath them. They were also beneath all the nobler joys of human beings. They had the appearance of human beings, but they had not the nature. And so they were neither men nor animals; they had not the good points of either, and were

consequently degraded below them both. And all who put on the appearance of other people, in order to get their superior advantages and blessings, become spiritual fauns, having only the form of the superior goodness, but not the nature, and destitute of their own true experiences of joy and sorrow, by which alone they can be exalted in the scale of being.

One human being cannot take the place of another, as Jacob took the place of Esau, without forfeiting much in himself that, if rightly exercised, would have ennobled him. You often see on a railway ticket, or a ticket of admission to some entertainment, the words "not transferable." The meaning of these words is, that you cannot give that ticket to another, but must use it yourself. Now, religion is an untransferable thing. You cannot hand over your religion to another; nor can another hand over his religion to you. The conscript, who is chosen by ballot to serve as a soldier in the French or Prussian army, can get a substitute who will take his place, if he will pay him a sufficient sum. But in the army of the Prince of Peace there

can be no substitution of that kind. Each soldier must serve himself. Faith and repentance are personal duties and necessary to salvation; and no one in the world can repent and believe for you. These acts, if performed at all, must be performed by yourself. You must exercise a personal faith in a personal Saviour. You cannot pray by proxy. Others may pray for you, but their prayer will not be regarded as a substitute for your own prayer. Although all God's saints should pray for you, that will not profit you, if you do not pray for yourself. You cannot turn over upon another, upon your parents, or your minister, or your teacher, what the Lord has specially called and qualified you to do for yourself. Your father's or mother's piety will not cover your impiety in God's sight. You must not think to get God's blessing, and creep into heaven under their cloak.

No Jacob can take the place of Esau. No one can properly take the place of another or do his work. Whatever one can put on, he is not. Each of you has a special fitness for your own special work, and no other one

possesses gifts of exactly the same kind as you have, in the same proportion or combination; and therefore no other one can occupy your place, or fill your individuality. However humble your sphere may be, it is in its own way as important as that of the archangel Gabriel, and no one in the universe but yourself can occupy it. Your work is just as necessary in its own place as his. The glow-worm with its lowly light is as truly fulfilling its mission as the sun that illumines all the earth and sky. And if you withhold your own personal contribution to the work of the world, the loss can never be made up. The universe must remain so much poorer for ever.

You suppose that Jacob got the blessing as the substitute of Esau in this cheap and easy fashion? No! God is just and true in all His ways. He got the nominal, but not the real blessing. He got the name, but not the reality of the good that was contained in the blessing. For the real blessing he had to work hard, and go through much suffering for many years. He had to prove his right to hold the blessing,

and use it properly. He had to show by his faith and good works that he was a better man than Esau, and worthier to have the birthright and the blessing of the elder son, in whose line all God's promises to mankind would be fulfilled. The good that his birthright did him was, to bring him more immediately under the searching discipline of God, to be redeemed by the angel from all the evil of his nature by much sorrow and suffering; to enable him to live the life of a pilgrim, going on painfully from strength to strength, and from victory to victory, while he halted upon his thigh. And so you may get a name to live by putting yourself in the place of a good person and imitating him; but you can only get the reality, the true spiritual blessing, by becoming worthy of it, and by you yourself living a good life. Depend upon it, if you deceive to get any good thing, you will not get the good thing, but what you have earned, the mere counterfeit or shadow of it, for *God always pays in kind.* If you put on the appearance of the godly person whom you admire, without the

reality of his godliness, not only will you lose the right to claim his work as your own, but you will lose the benefit of all the discipline to which the doing of the work by yourself was intended to subject your own spirit.

Learn, then, to be manly and honourable. You cannot possibly have any feeling of self-respect so long as you are not what you seem; and the self-contempt that is connected with hypocrisy is the most humiliating and wretched of all things. Never try to get a blessing that does not belong to you; to get personal gain and advantage by putting yourself in another's place and claiming his merits. Stand on your own footing. Be always yourself. Scorn to claim a fairer character than you possess, or to be held in higher esteem than you deserve. Never allow your life to be the means of misleading your fellow-creatures into erroneous ideas regarding you. Seek to win such a transparent truthfulness of character, that the inward evidence of your heart may be shown by outward signs, known and read of all men. The only One whose

appearance and manner you can put on safely and with advantage, whose merits you can assume, whose righteousness you can make your own, is the Lord Jesus Christ. You can clothe yourself in His robe; you can cherish and exhibit His spirit; you can speak with His voice and imitate His example; for the more closely you resemble Him, the more you will be raised above all need of deception, the more you will be your true self. Your individuality will be brought out in striking relief, as one who is known to Jesus by name, and is brought into the closest relations with Him. And He will give you His grace and help, so that you will never wear a double character, and never shame the Christian cause by the disgrace of falsehood and imposture. And He will give you the Father's blessing of the eldest, which maketh truly rich, and with which no sorrow is added.

Exalting our Gate

"*He that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.*"—PROVERBS xvii. 19.

IN the lawless East, houses and churches exposed to the attacks of robbers have low doorways, so that you have almost to stoop to enter them. The Bedouins of the desert are splendid riders, and go on their plundering expeditions always on horseback. They would consider it beneath their dignity to attack any place on foot. And hence they

make raids only on houses that have lofty doorways, that can admit them on horseback; upon the houses of the rich and the noble, that in the East have courts like the palaces of Italy, into which you can drive in a carriage from the street. It is only such houses that are worth entering; for it is only in such houses that sufficient plunder can be got to repay the risk. The splendid old Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, built over the cave where Jesus was born, has for this reason a very low door, hidden in a dark corner. To exalt a person's gate is therefore to invite the attention of the robber to the riches that are to be found within, to advertise his wealth and seek his destruction.

Now, what the wise man means by his proverb is, that if you are proud and haughty, you will expose yourself to dangers as great in your life as the man exposes himself to who exalts the gate of his house, and so invites the Bedouin robber to enter in on horseback and murder him or plunder his goods. There are foes as deadly, and possessed of powers of

mischief as great, as the Bedouin robbers, which are ready to take advantage of the opening you give them by cherishing an arrogant and lofty spirit, to enter into your hearts and rob you of all that is dearest and most precious in your life. There are many sins that, like Spanish beggars, ride only upon horseback ; vices that carry things with a high hand, that assume lofty airs and make themselves big and consequential. They never dismount; they never enter your heart on foot. As if knowing how puny and weak-kneed they really are, they must impose upon the imagination, and raise themselves on high by outward circumstances. You hear it said of a man in a proud and haughty mood, "He is on his high horse." Now, to admit these proud, lofty sins that ride on horseback, as it were, you must lift high the gate of your heart. They cannot cross the threshold of a lowly mind ; and if you do not exalt your gate, these high-flying sins will not trouble you ; you are beneath their consideration. You are too low for pride, and scorn, and worldly ambition, and high-mindedness, to

enter in; but, thank God, not too low for the kingdom of heaven, which stoops to the lowest, which belongs of right to the poor in spirit, to creep through and fill and sanctify your heart.

From the proverb of the text, therefore, you learn the wisdom of stooping. The celebrated Benjamin Franklin, of America, who was the first to draw down the lightnings of heaven to the earth, by means of a child's kite, was once, when a young man, shown out of the house of a friend he was visiting by a narrow passage. As he was going along it his friend hurriedly said, "Stoop, stoop!" Not understanding the advice, Franklin struck his head violently against a beam that projected overhead. "My lad," said his friend, "you are young, and the world is before you; learn to stoop as you go through it, and you will save yourself many a hard blow." And so, when you are face to face with an angry person, it would be foolish, even though you know that his anger is without cause, to oppose him with equal anger. If you exalt our

gate, you court the coming into your heart of pride and fury, which will rob you of your reason, and make you say and do foolish things in your haste. Lower your gate, then, that only the quiet, meek grace of humility and gentleness can come in; and let your lips give utterance to the soft words that turn away wrath. When reproved for an error you have committed, do not resent it, or seek to justify or excuse the fault, for this will only aggravate the evil, and cause deeper displeasure. But let down your high gate, that only meekness, and lowliness of spirit, and contrition of heart may enter in, and confess your wrong and ask for forgiveness; and so you will cut away all ground of complaint against you, and change your accuser into your friend. How much more easily and pleasantly you would get through life, if you only knew how to stoop gracefully and at the right time.

There is nothing that people are so fond of as elevating their gates. They wish to make them as grand and imposing as possible. They imagine that when they rise in the

world, and get to a higher position in society, they will secure the two objects of their ambition. They will have larger room for, and let in more, happiness and friendliness; they will be happier themselves, and obtain greater regard and admiration from others. But, in reality, by elevating their gate they are seeking destruction, running the risk of destroying their own peace of mind and winning the envy and dislike of their friends and neighbours. By rising from an inferior to a higher station in life, they find in their new position that they occupy even a lower place than they did in their old position, with the additional pang of disappointed hope and baffled vanity. In his own generation he is not wise, nor makes the best provision even to foster his own pride, who seeks to elevate his gate in this way.

You know plants that grow on the mountains do not send up long stems and wide-spreading branches. On the contrary, they creep close to the soil, and gather all their branches and leaves into thick moss-like tufts, because only in that way can they withstand the furious storms which rage over their

elevated growing-place, and which, if they raised themselves on high, would root them up and whirl them away. And so, exposed to the storms of a world lying in wickedness, the prudent course for you is to assume an attitude and habit of mind that will enable you to escape the dangerous blasts. Exalting your gate, growing up haughtily in the air, standing upon your dignity, asserting your rights, the storms of life will break you or uproot you. But lowering your gate, exhibiting a meek and lowly spirit, forbearing and forgiving one another, these storms will pass harmlessly over you.

Have you ever tried to put out a bee or a butterfly that has come into your room some hot summer day through the half-open window? In vain you seek to guide it down to the place where the window is open. It has some kind of instinct that causes it to fly ever upwards, towards the highest part of the window, and it dashes itself in its struggles against the upper panes of glass, which it imagines to be transparent air. If left to itself it might be hours or days before it found

out the opening, when it might be worn-out and famished and incapable of escaping. It would continue to fly up and up, always to the top of the window, to the highest light. At last, by skilful manœuvring, you manage to get it down to the opening of the window; and then it rushes through the chink rejoicingly, and is out of sight in a moment in the wide, sunny air. I saw one day a chaffinch that had got into a conservatory. It was a big glass house, with a lofty roof and a low door, which on mild summer days was kept open at certain hours. The chaffinch wanted to get out, but it flew always up to the roof of the greenhouse, expecting to escape that way. And it was a whole day before it was set at large by the open door, and then only when it was driven to it by some one who entered.

And is it not true of us that we wish to escape to heaven by the high roof rather than by the low door? We beat the wings of our spirit against the upper part of the window, instead of flying through the lower part of it that is open. When shall we learn the great lesson, to fly low if we would find

the way to heaven, if we would escape from many of the ills of life that shut us in on every side, from many of the walls of trouble with which we surround ourselves by our pride and obstinacy and haughtiness of spirit? It is by humility that you enter into God's large place of deliverance. High things imprison you; lowly things set you free. It is not by exalting your gate that you make your hearts worthy to receive and entertain the Lord of glory, but by making your gate low; for thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the spirit of the contrite." And when He enters by the lowly gate He makes it a high and holy place by His presence, and all heaven enters with Him. Lower your gate, then, to admit only the lowly virtues, the meekness and humility which will exalt you. Lower your gate to admit even the Lord of glory Himself, and thus you will seek salvation and not destruction.

The Lad and the Arrows

"*But the lad knew not anything.*"
1 SAMUEL XX. 39.

THERE are roses that grow in such close clusters that you cannot pull a full-blown rose without plucking off along with it a bud or two. So our human lives are so closely clustered together that what happens to one affects another. Into the beautiful story of the devoted friendship of David and Jonathan is brought a side glimpse of a little lad so

obscure that his name is not even mentioned, but who shows such sterling qualities that he is well worth studying.

One day his master took him out with him to a spot where there was a great landmark of a rock rising out of the plain, called Ezel. Beside this rock he gave out that he was going to amuse himself by practising with his bow and arrows. The favourite weapon of Jonathan was the bow. The tribe of Benjamin, to which he belonged, was a tribe of archers, and Jonathan was the captain of the king's guard of bowmen. On this particular day he pretended to engage in the familiar sport of archery, and the little lad carried his quiver with a supply of arrows in it. While Jonathan was practising his shooting, his servant had to gather the arrows that had been discharged, and bring them back to his master. After a while, as if tired of his game, Jonathan gave his quiver and bow to the little lad, and bade him take them home, while he himself would follow soon after.

Behind the big rock Ezel, in one of its

shady crevices, David was hiding himself from his terrible enemy Saul. And Jonathan, who knew of his hiding-place, had previously arranged by this little artifice to tell him whether his father's fury was over, and whether it would be safe for him to come back to the palace. When Jonathan said to the lad "Is not the arrow beyond thee?" David, who overheard the words, knew that Saul was determined to kill him, and that he must escape for his life. When the lad went away David and Jonathan came together for a short time; and then, with tender words and bitter tears, the two friends parted, never more to meet in this world.

Of all this byplay that was going on, the little lad knew nothing. He did not know that the arrows which he saw his master shooting and which he ran to pick up, had a meaning quite as clear as the arrow-like marks on the dial-plate of the telegraph instrument, to which the quivering needle so rapidly points. He did not know that in what he was doing he was the messenger of fate who preserved the life of David, so that he might

become the king of Israel, and accomplish God's mighty purposes in behalf of His people. He never thought of prying into his master's conduct, or trying to find out what must have puzzled him very much—why such a splendid marksman was shooting his arrows past the target, without any aim or purpose, and why he should so suddenly have got tired of his sport, and ordered him to go home alone. Whatever might have been his thoughts he kept them discreetly to himself, and simply did as he was commanded to do. Jonathan told him to run and find out the arrows. "Make speed, haste, stay not," said his master, and the lad sped away almost as fast as the arrows themselves, and brought them back with the least possible delay to his master. He put his whole heart into the work and did it thoroughly. And his conduct in this seeming game for amusement was of a piece with his conduct in the serious work of attacking with his master the fortress of the Philistines at Michmash. For we have every reason to believe that the unknown armour-bearer of Jonathan on that

occasion was no other than this little lad. "Come and let us go over to the garrison of the Philistines. It may be that the Lord will fight for us, for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few," said the gallant Jonathan. The armour-bearer, sharing the same dauntless faith and courage, replied, "Do all that is in thine heart; behold I am with thee according to thine heart." And so, climbing on their hands and knees up the steep face of the cliff, the two young men reached the top, and discharged such a flight of arrows from their bows that twenty men fell at the first onset, and the garrison fled in a panic. Thus the same excellent reliable qualities which characterised the youthful hero in the incident of the shooting, distinguished him in helping to win for Israel this glorious victory.

Have you ever seen a bird standing on a telegraph wire? It simply regards it as a convenient perch, and knows not the messages that are passing beneath its feet, upon which the most important interests depend. And so little do you know, often, the meaning of

your simplest acts, which you do to please yourselves. Perhaps great results depend upon them. The most trifling things may have all-important consequences. In Nature small things work out great ends. The insect comes to suck the honey out of a flower, and all that it cares for is to get a pleasant food for itself; and that little act is used to make the flower produce fruit and seed for the blessing of the world. You blow the downy head of a dandelion in sport to find out what o'clock it is; and your play is helping to carry out God's serious purpose of distributing plants over the earth. You make a slide on the snow-covered street, by pressing down the new-fallen snow by the motion of your gliding feet, and you are doing on a small scale what Nature is doing on a stupendous scale in the Alps and Himalayas. There the snow that falls on the heights is changed by its own weight, as it presses down the valleys, into glacier ice. And this is the most wonderful agency of Nature, bringing down the vapours of the sky from the clouds, in the safest, slowest, most steadfast, and con-

tinuous way, to form the sources of the great rivers of the world, and to water all the plains and valleys. And so everything that you do in play or earnest is connected with some great, far-reaching principle. What you do may be a trifle, but it helps to build up your character, and also to show the character that you have built up, and it has eternal consequences. The things that you do may often seem like drawing a bow at a venture, but the arrow may have results whose full nature you will never know till you get to the other side of the grave.

In the celebrated charge of the "Light Brigade," in the Crimea, the heroic band knew that the order was a mistake, that some one had blundered. But they did not ask the reason why, but boldly went forward to meet the enemy according to their duty, and so earned immortal fame. They gave implicit obedience to those who had a right to claim it. And this is the special duty of young people. They cannot guide themselves, and they must therefore obey the leading of those who are older and wiser. Your duty is to

obey your parents, to do what your teachers bid you; and this not sulkily, compelled by fear, but smilingly and willingly, from faith and love to those who are over you, such as the lad in the story had to Jonathan. And by-and-by you will find out for yourselves that you did the right thing, and were wisely guided.

Make the little lad your own model, too, in doing speedily what you have to do. Whatever the task be, do it instantly if you would do it easily. David said to God, "I made haste and delayed not to keep Thy commandments." And so should you say and do. The young lad in the story was employed in the service of a prince, and it was a proverb of old that "the king's business required haste." I am afraid that there is no other business which people take so easily as the business of their heavenly King. They do their own business first, and what time is left is given to the King's business. This surely is not being faithful and loyal! God's arrows fly beyond you, and you may never pick them up; you may hopelessly lose them, if you do

not run to meet them. Remember who said, "I must be about my Father's business."

God is testing you by your little daily acts, as Gideon tested his soldiers at the wayside brook; and just as Gideon chose his warriors from those who did not lie down leisurely to drink the water, but simply scooped it up in the hollow of their hand for a moment and then passed on, so God chooses those who are to do good work in the world, and to help Him in overcoming its evil, by the diligent, effectual way in which, when off their guard, they do the common things of everyday life. It is supposed that those strange cuneiform or arrow-shaped characters in which the old Assyrians stamped their records upon bricks, and which our scholars have made out in such a wonderful way, had the original idea of them derived from the shooting of arrows, to find out, by the direction of their fall, what was the will of heaven regarding any matter in which they were interested. And so your acts are like these arrows. If you do all things not as unto men, but as unto the Lord, God will put a higher meaning into them,

and make them of greater worth and influence ; just as Jesus put a higher meaning into Mary's anointing of Him, and made the barley loaves and the fishes of the little lad a feast for a multitude. As you help Jesus by your work, you will know the miracle that He is doing. Your work will bring you into sympathy with, and an understanding of, the ways of God. The falling of an apple will reveal to you the law that keeps the stars in their courses. The flying of a boy's kite will tell you the secret of the lightning. And at last you will find out the meaning of any act you unconsciously do with a loving heart and a right mind, when Jesus shall reveal to you at the judgment-seat that you have done it for Him.

The Right Foot Foremost

"*Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.*"—ECCLESIASTES v. 1.

IN ancient times, among the Greeks and Romans, the steps in front of a temple leading up to the great door were made always of an uneven number. The reason of this was that the worshipper, when he wanted to go in, might begin the ascent with his right foot, and mount each step in succession with left and right foot alternately, until

at last he could put his right foot on the top step, and so in a becoming attitude enter the house of his god. It was not lawful to cross the threshold of a temple with the left foot first. The right foot had always to be put foremost. It is interesting to recall this curious custom, for it gives us a very good idea of the deep reverence with which the heathen approached the presence of their divinity.

This custom, you notice, is but a slight variation of that which has always been observed in Eastern countries. Moses, when he drew near to the burning bush in the desert, put off his shoes, for he felt that the place on which he stood was holy ground. The Jewish priests served in the Tabernacle and Temple barefooted, in token of their deep respect for God's holy place; and in the synagogue the members first removed their shoes, leaving them outside, and then concealed their bare feet under their long flowing dress, while engaged in worship. To this day you cannot enter a Mahometan mosque without taking off your shoes and leaving them at the threshold. In some mosques the rules are so strict

that the custodians insist upon your actually taking off your shoes at the door, to guard against the possibility of their being made of leather tanned from the skin of a pig—an unclean animal to them. But in the generality of cases they are satisfied if you put their own slippers, made of sheep-skin, provided for the purpose, over your shoes. When Mr. David Roberts, the celebrated artist, was in Cairo, he was allowed to visit the principal mosques of the city, in order to make drawings of their interiors. But this privilege, never before granted to a Christian, had one strange condition annexed to it, viz., that he should not use paint-brushes made of hog's bristles, as even that small portion of the unclean animal would desecrate the sacred buildings. Similarly, Hindu priests will not permit a foreigner to enter their temples with his shoes on, in case the leather should be made of the skin of a cow, an animal which they think sacred, and consider it sacrilege to kill.

We thus see that people have different ways of showing their reverence in religious things. In the East they remove their shoes, and

enter their place of worship barefooted, but with their hats on their heads. In the West we keep on our shoes, but take off our hats, and enter a church bareheaded. The Jew wears his hat in the synagogue, and would consider it highly disrespectful to the sacred place to remove his head-dress. One class of worshippers stand up in prayer; another class of worshippers kneel down in token of the same reverence. And it is well perhaps that there should be such diversities, in order that men may learn the great truth that God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth; that it is not the outward attitude of the worshipper which He looks at, but the state of the heart.

Jesus Himself went through the ceremony of baptism, which for Him was a needless form, in order that He might show His oneness with those whom He came to save, and who needed to be cleansed from their sins; and in this He taught all His followers a wise lesson, to sympathise with what is good in religious rites that are strange and even unnecessary to them. A spirit of kindly

courtesy and consideration for others should prompt all who profess to have the mind of Christ in them to act on such occasions as He did. You are bound to enter an alien place with your right foot foremost, in a becoming frame of mind ; and I trust that, in this way, you will keep your foot when you happen to go to a strange place of worship, and be as reverential towards the sacred things of others as you would wish them to be towards your own sacred things. By such tender consideration for the feelings of others in their religious worship, you will win their regard for yourself, and their reverence for the true spirit of religion.

But I want to make use of the image of the text in regard to your behaviour in your own church, and your treatment of that form of worship with which you have been familiar from your earliest years. In order to enjoy the worship of God in the sanctuary, and profit by it, you must be careful to prepare yourselves for it. If the heathen worshipper was mindful to go up the steps of his temple in such an orderly way that he could put his

right foot on the threshold of the shrine, should not you, in regard to your own religious rites, do something that would be equivalent to that action, something that would show the same reverence and consideration? A pagan devotee could not enjoy the sacrifice or the ritual of the temple if he did not act in this way. If by any chance he put his left foot foremost in entering the temple, he felt that he profaned it, and could expect no blessing from its services. And so, there is much even in the way you walk to church, in the way you enter its door, and sit down in your accustomed seat, that has to do with preparing you for the service in which you are to engage, or hindering you from entering into the spirit of it.

You are so made that outward things, and often very trifling outward things, have a wonderful power of influencing the state of your heart, so as to put you in a suitable or unsuitable frame of mind to receive spiritual impressions. If you get up from a late breakfast, and rush hurriedly through the streets to the church; if you talk loudly on

the way, speaking about your worldly affairs, or gossiping about your friends and neighbours; if you enter the church in a careless manner, not thinking of what you are doing or where you are going; if you do any or all of these things, how can you expect to be in a good mood to enjoy and profit by the service? That is putting the left foot foremost, and not the right, when you cross the threshold of God's house; and you cannot feel any such reverential awe as will hallow your service, and fit your spirit for the blessing of heaven.

People expect that the church itself is to do a miracle for them, to make them devotional of its own accord, whenever they enter it; to change their character, even though they themselves do nothing to help, but are entirely indifferent or passive. By merely entering a church, and taking part in its services, they imagine that they shall be lifted up to heaven, and have high and sacred thoughts and feelings put into them. But God works always by means; and the means which the church possesses of impressing you

are very much those which you yourselves have given to it. The church to you is either a sacred or a common place, according as you make it. Your own thoughts and memories and associations make a church solemn and impressive, or dull and dreary to you. It depends upon the frame of mind that you are in, whether the services of the church shall bring you under the powers of the world to come, or under the powers of the ordinary world in which you live. What you have to do then is to cherish a spirit of prayer, and a sense of God's presence in the sanctuary habitually.

Do not leave the acquiring of this devout feeling to mere impulse. How careful were the heathen about putting their right foot foremost on the threshold of their temple! This was not left to chance. It was not a mere accident. The very steps of the temple were made and numbered exactly by the architect beforehand for the purpose. And so you must arrange beforehand the steps, as it were, that lead you to the house of God, and the steps in the sanctuary that lead to

the true and profitable worship of God, in such a way as that you will be able to put your right foot foremost, and be in your best mood of mind. Leave nothing to accident. Aim at acquiring this frame of mind as diligently and systematically as you would seek to acquire any new language or profession. You must use every possible means to bring your whole spiritual nature into a calm receptive state, if the Holy Spirit is to fit you for communing with the Divine Being. And such endeavours and preparations, which are peculiarly agreeable to the divine will, will be helped by divine grace. The more you get into the way of such preparations, the easier and the more effectual will they become. Your worship in God's house thus prepared for will quicken and inspire your soul, will bring heaven very near to you; and you will feel it to be good for you to be thus shut out from the world and shut in with Christ. The very walls of the church will gather holy associations around them, as the hoary stone gathers moss, and they will awaken at once a reverential feeling. The

habit of true worship will in such a place become a second nature to you.

And putting your best foot foremost in going to the sanctuary, and to God's altar in the sanctuary, you will be able, when you leave the sanctuary, to put your best foot foremost in all the walks of life. You will carry the holy preparations of the sanctuary into your ordinary pursuits. Reverencing God's house, you will reverence the houses of your fellow-creatures. Your first salutation when you enter a house will be "Peace be to this house," as Jesus commanded His disciples. You will put your right foot foremost in crossing the threshold of the humblest dwelling, and treat the inmates as if they were worshippers in a temple, having respect to the image of God which each of them wears, and to the house of God, which each private house ought to be. And the feet that you have rightly kept when you went to the house of God, will be swift to do good in the world. They will climb the steps of success with the right foot foremost; and all the ways of religion to you will be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace.

A Penny

"*Bring me a penny, that I may see it.*"
MARK xii. 15

THIS is a most touching proof of the poverty of Jesus. He had not a penny in the world. Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor. The purse which the disciples had in common, and which paid their daily expenses, was carried by Judas, who held a tight grip of it. He had therefore to ask the people standing round about for

the loan of a penny, that He might make it an object-lesson to teach them a great truth which they needed to learn.

The Pharisees were the bitter enemies of Christ. They made common cause with the Herodians, a sect with which they had nothing in common, and which was as sceptical as they themselves were superstitious. He exposed the evil practices of both parties; and they both therefore went about to be revenged upon Him, and sought opportunity constantly. On the present occasion they set a trap for Him to catch Him in His words. It was skilfully set and cunningly disguised. It was in the form of a question that was often in the heart and upon the lips of many persons at the time, and seemed a very proper and innocent question. The Romans had conquered the Holy Land and made the Jews tributary to them. They appointed publicans or tax-gatherers all over the country, to collect the revenue or tribute and send it to the imperial treasury at Rome. People as a rule do not like taxes; but the haughty Jews especially

hated this tax, for it was the proof of their national humiliation—that their necks were under a foreign yoke ; and they despised and detested the persons who were appointed to collect the money, and would have nothing to do with them. The Pharisees and Herodians, knowing well this feeling among the people, asked Jesus if it was lawful to give this tribute or tax to Cæsar, the Roman Emperor, or not. If Jesus replied that it was lawful, then He would set Himself in opposition to public opinion, and He would lose all His influence with the people, if indeed they would not do Him personal violence in their anger. If He replied that it was not lawful, then He would set Himself in opposition to the authorities, and would be put in prison and punished as a traitor to the Government. In either case His enemies would get Him put out of the way of further troubling them, and they would be amply revenged upon Him for all His scornful words against them.

Jesus saw through their design, and at once exposed their deceit, and by His wonderfully

simple and yet wonderfully wise answer He put Himself on the safe side and taught them a great lesson. He asked to see a penny, and when it was handed to Him, He inquired whose image and superscription it bore. They told him "Cæsar's." Then, He said, it is quite clear that this is Cæsar's property; it was he who coined it and gave it to you, and you by circulating it and taking it as the price of what you buy or sell, show that you acknowledge his authority, and you must therefore give him back his own. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."

You must not run away with the idea that the penny which our Lord examined at this time was a bronze or copper coin like the penny you sometimes get from your parents and friends and spend so pleasantly on what you like. It was called by the Romans a *denarius*, and was made of silver, somewhat like our sixpence. It was worth about eightpence-halfpenny of our money. It was the chief coin in use, and was employed by the Western nations long after the Roman Empire

perished. Indeed, our own word penny is a relic of it, for the *denarius* was called by the French *denier*, and you can easily understand how *denier* came, in course of time, to be changed into penny. The *d.* of it is still preserved in our £ *s. d.*, pounds, shillings, and pence.

I have seen a specimen of the penny which Jesus held in His hand on this memorable occasion. It had a portrait of Tiberius Cæsar crowned with a garland on the one side, with a Latin inscription, which meant that it was the image of the divine Augustus or the god Augustus; and on the other there was an image of the Emperor as high-priest. The putting of the portrait of a king or ruler on a coin to make it his possession was forbidden by the Jewish law, for that was one of the foolish meanings which they read into the second commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath." And it was not till the establishment of the Roman power in Palestine that an image was added to the

superscription of any coin current among the Jews. At the present day the Turkish coins used in Palestine have no image of the Sultan upon them, like the Queen's head upon our coins, because the Koran, like the Jewish law, forbids the painting or carving or engraving of any human or animal likeness on any object. The Jews, therefore, you can easily understand, abhorred the coin even while they were compelled to use it in business, for it was not only a proof of their conquered state, but it was also a gross offence to their religion. And hence you see what a force there was in our Lord's question, "Whose image is this?" This coin was not a Jewish but a Roman coin; it had none of the marks of Jewish origin. On the contrary, it had on it what the Jews disowned and forbade; it must therefore be given back to him to whom it belonged, whose mark of ownership was on it. If the putting of the head of Cæsar on a coin is unlawful according to the traditions of the Jews, the keeping back of that coin from him to whom it is due is a breach of the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." "Render

therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."

And we can easily understand how Christ should have added, "And unto God the things that are God's," for that was suggested by the penny itself. The superscription of the coin contained, as I have said, the words, "The god Augustus." The Roman emperors, it is well known, claimed divine honour, and you find on all their monuments carved the word *divus*, indicating that they put themselves on the same footing as the gods. What are we to think of the ignorance and superstition of a people who allowed this —who worshipped not merely human beings like themselves, no matter how exalted, but often monsters of iniquity, stained with every vice and crime? What are we to think of the god Nero and the god Caligula? They made a god of Cæsar and worshipped him, just as the people made a god of Herod. They gave to the creature the homage that was due to the Creator alone. The Roman Emperor in putting that blasphemous superscription upon his coin was guilty of robbery. He was

taking to himself what belonged only to God, and therefore this inscription called upon Jesus to proclaim the truth, "Render unto God the things that are God's." For Cæsar himself, great as he was, was God's creature, and the things that were Cæsar's were the things of God.

A penny was the amount of tax payable by every Jew to the Roman Government. It was also the price of a day's work, "the living wage" in Palestine; for in our Lord's parable every labourer in the vineyard got a penny; and it was two pence that the Good Samaritan left with the innkeeper to pay the board of the wounded Jew whom he rescued from the thieves on the way to Jericho.

We learn a great many important lessons from coins. We could read the whole history of our country in the coins that have circulated in it from the earliest times. They tell us about the kings who reigned and about the wars and revolutions that took place. A coin may give a truer idea of national character than a long and learned essay. In early times coins had pious mottoes on them,

for our forefathers considered that the power of earning and possessing money was given by God, and that the money should therefore be spent in the service of God, in doing good in the world. But though we have given up the practice, we should not give up the idea from which it sprang. If you look at one of our own pennies, you will see in the superscription the letters D.G. and F.D. These letters mean "By the grace of God," and "Defender of the Faith." So you see that a penny has still the marks of religion on it, and points your thoughts up to God. He who had not a penny in the world, has nevertheless His name on every penny you possess, and on all the gold and silver and copper coins of the great British Empire, telling us that all this boundless wealth is His in the first instance, that He has the first and best right to it.

It is by the grace of God that Queen Victoria reigns and coins the money you use; it is by the grace of God that you get that money. Seek to make a gracious use of it then. Render unto God the things that

are God's. First give yourselves to God, and then all that you are and all that you have. Seek to be converted yourselves, turned to your right use—viz., to love and serve God; and then your money will be converted also, turned to its right use, to do good in the world, and to help on the coming of the blessed kingdom of God. People think that when they have given a certain sum of money to the cause of religion they have done all that God requires of them, while they are free to keep the rest themselves. But that is not all that God requires of you and me. He requires that *all* our money should be given to Him, laid upon His altar, made *Corban* or sacred by being dedicated to the Lord, like the money which the Jew of old gave to the Temple. And if it is thus *all dedicated* to Him who has bestowed it upon us, this ensures that none of it shall be wasted on folly or spent in the service of sin. It will be all wisely used as it should be—as God meant it to be—in making yourselves and the world better and happier.

"By grace," says the Apostle Paul, "are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Not only do you owe the money in your purse to the grace of God, but also the salvation of your souls. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. All other things require to be bought with money; but this blessing, the most valuable of all, is the freest of all. Jesus wrought out the salvation of the world without a penny; for He gave not money, but what no money could buy, Himself. In the hot streets of Cairo in Egypt I have often heard the water-seller, with a bulging skin full of water on his back, and a brass cup in his hand, crying, "The gift of God, the gift of God, who will buy the gift of God?" The Egyptian water-seller called persons to come and buy from him the water which he got from the Nile, where God caused it to flow with unfailing regularity. But Jesus says, "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." He does not sell, He gives. If you have not a penny in the world you can buy from Christ on

these terms what your souls need more than your bodies need water; "God so loved the world, that He *gave* His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The Sweet Cane

"*Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money.*"—ISAIAH xliii. 24.

IT is a matter of dispute among Bible scholars what this sweet cane really is. Some say that it is a kind of sweet-scented reed that grows in India; and that it was for the sake of its fragrance that it was used in the Temple service. But incense is already spoken of by the prophet as an offering that was withheld from the Lord. We must

suppose, therefore, that it was something different; an object that appealed to the sense of taste and not of smell that he meant when he alluded to the sweet cane. He speaks of it as having come from a strange and distant land. "To what purpose," asks the Lord, by the mouth of the prophet, "cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country?" In all likelihood, then, we must understand by the sweet cane of Isaiah the sugar-cane which has become so well known and so widely used in our own days.

The native country of the sugar-cane was India, where its cultivation and use were known from the earliest times. The Arabs brought it into Egypt, and then into the south-west of Europe. It was afterwards transported to the West Indies, and became so much at home there that most people imagine that to be its native country. It was brought into the Holy Land probably during the time of Solomon, whose ships, trading with all parts of the then known world, visited India, and brought its products to

Jerusalem. But it was not cultivated in the Holy Land till long after the days of our Saviour; and in the time of the prophets it was regarded as a very valuable article, got with much trouble and expense from India or Egypt. In the Middle Ages we know, indeed, that it was grown extensively at Tiberias and Acre, as well as in the rich soil and hot climate of the Jordan valley, which are very like those of its native India. We read how the Crusaders made large sums of money by growing the cane and making sugar from it, and how the fresh juice of the cane greatly refreshed their armies during their toilsome marches through the land. All around Jericho I saw the picturesque ruins of mills which they had used for crushing the cane, called by the people in the neighbourhood Tawâhin a Sukkar.

In Egypt the sugar-cane is grown in great abundance in the rich, dark soil of the fields along the banks of the Nile; and there are a good many sugar-mills in the country, with tall chimneys like our own, sending out black clouds of smoke into the blue sky, and they

look very strange among the pyramids and palms of that wonderful old land. At Cairo you see, in the outskirts, the people watering the roots of the canes by means of little rills led along from the river Nile. And in every square and open place in the city you notice heaps of the cut canes, which the owners offer for sale to the passers-by. And along the streets and country-roads you constantly meet persons cutting these long canes which they have bought into little bits with a pocket-knife, and then munching them and sucking the juice. There are two varieties of cane, one of a pale yellow and the other of a dark purple colour. The last kind is the most juicy, and the richest in sugar, and seemed to be the kind that was preferred by the natives. Its sweet sap in the hot, dry air of Egypt, which makes one constantly thirsty, is most refreshing.

Being such a rare and precious article in the days of Isaiah, we may well think of the Jews putting the sugar-cane on their altars as an offering to the Lord. They were always in the habit of dedicating to the Lord what

they themselves considered the most valuable things they possessed ; and the rarer and the more precious an article was, the more acceptable they thought it would be to Him. They gave to Him the first-fruits of their harvests, and the best of their flocks and herds. And the sugar-cane, because it was brought from a far country with great trouble and cost, and because they themselves were fond of it, they believed would make a peculiarly suitable gift, better even than the corn, and wine, and olive fruits which grew in their own fields, and were so common that they were thought little of. Just as fifty years ago, when wheaten bread was a great rarity in the Highlands, it was thought more courteous to put a loaf of it, if it could be procured at all, upon the hospitable board, as a treat to entertain the stranger with, than the common oatcake that was used for the daily consumption of the household.

For a time the Jewish worshippers continued to lay this valuable product upon God's altar with great self-denial and devotion, in token how much they valued the

house and worship of God ; and they got the blessing connected with such self-denial and devotion ; for we can give nothing to the Lord without getting back from Him a richer gift than we bestow, for He rewards us like a sovereign. But by-and-by a time of coldness came, and the people of Israel lost their generous liberality. They became mean and miserly, and the first thing they did was to give up their contributions to the cause of religion, as people always do when their fear of God is taught only by the precepts of man, and they do not value religion for the personal good it has done themselves. Their hearts went after the things of the world, and they grudged the time, and labour, and cost involved in the offerings required in the service and up-keep of the national worship. And God, who valued these gifts and services, not for their own sake, but for the sake of the love and devotion which they expressed, remonstrated with them.

How pathetic is His complaint! He who had done such great things for them and given them such rich blessings, had to say to

them, "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices!" How different was it in the blessed olden time, when their forefathers brought, each one, such a lavish quantity of precious gifts for the building of God's house in the wilderness, that they had to be restrained. Their hearts were deeply moved, and therefore the willing mind was stamped as a hall-mark, signifying its genuine value, upon each gift brought by them. With an open, princely hand they brought their free offerings every morning. They did what Mary did long afterwards with the alabaster box of very precious ointment, which she broke and poured upon the head of her Lord; and they, like her, earned the highest praise of heaven. They acted like the first converts of Christianity after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them at Pentecost—they sold their possessions and laid the price at the Apostles' feet. Neither counted they anything which they had their own, but to be freely used for the good of the believing community; so greatly had the

grace of the Gospel enlarged their hearts and delivered them from their natural selfishness. What a contrast there was now, when the sweet cane was refused by the churlish hearts and the closed hands of God's people. How they had changed! And they got worse and worse, harder-hearted and closer-fisted, until they ended their career of selfishness and covetousness by selling for thirty pieces of silver the Unspeakable Gift which God in the fulness of His love sent to them, and bribing the soldiers who guarded His empty tomb to tell a falsehood about His resurrection.

God was to the people of Israel all that our Queen and our judges and rulers are to us; and all the affairs of their life, their common everyday life as well as their worship on the holy days, were under His control and guidance. And therefore everything was religious; holiness to the Lord was upon the bells of the horses, and the common pots and pans in the household were as sacred as the holy vessels in the Temple. Everything was to be done for God's glory; and everything was to be employed in His service.

Now, that is what our Christian religion wants our life to be. It wants to bring the law of God into the little things of life, and to impress upon us the great truth that he who breaketh the least of the commandments of God, the same shall be least in the kingdom of heaven. Our daily labour is meant to be a common familiar parable or picture-book, by means of which God is teaching us lessons of faith and love, of duty and self-denial and obedience, which will fit us for our eternal home. He is always drawing persons to Him by their business and daily employment, by the things with which they are most familiar in their daily life; just as of old He drew the fishermen of Galilee from their nets to become fishers of men, and the wise men of the East, by their knowledge of astronomy, to follow the star which led them to the manger of the Babe of Bethlehem.

What is sugar? It is not made for man in the first instance, as he selfishly imagines It is made for the use of the plant itself; and it is only as an after-design that you

have the use of it. It is a food of the plant, stored up in different parts of its structure, most commonly in the roots and in the growing shoots. The sweet cane to which Isaiah refers, which is just a big grass, has, in the pith of its thick, jointed stem, a greater quantity of sugar than any other known plant. And what is the use of this food or sweet juice stored up in the stem of the cane? It is for the purpose of enabling the plant to put forth blossom and fruit, and to feed the blossom and fruit when they come. The sugar-cane now rarely produces seed. It has been multiplied so long by means of cuttings and suckers that it has lost the habit of seed-making. And, indeed, man does not want it to seed; for in that case all the sugar in it would be used up in making the flower and seed, and there would be none left for man, and, so far as he is concerned, it would be wasted. Therefore he does not allow the cane to flower or seed, but, when its stem is full of sugar, he cuts it down, and appropriates the sugar to his own use.

The real purpose of the sugar in the cane,

if left to itself, is thus to enable the plant to put forth blossom and seed. It is not for the sake of its own sweetness that it exists in the plant, but that it may feed these most important parts. It yields up its own goodness to produce a higher goodness. You know the leaves and stem of a plant are for the use of the plant itself; but the flower and fruit and seed are for the use of the next generation, for the sake of the young plants that are to spring from it. You thus see how the plant sacrifices itself in all its parts for the unselfish desire to benefit the seed; how the sugar sacrifices itself for the sake of the seed; and how, except the seed fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but, if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

It is this lesson of self-sacrifice that you are to learn from the sweet cane. It was this that made it such a suitable offering to lay upon the altar of God. And it was this that formed the essence of the rebuke to the covetous Israelites when they refused to offer it to heaven. Their want of self-denial was

in such a striking contrast to the nature of the sweet cane, which yielded itself a living sacrifice, and gave up all its sweetness for the benefit of flower and seed, and another race that was to spring from it. You do not worship God now in the manner of the ancient Jews. No more can you bring sacrifices and offerings of sweet canes to God. Such ceremonial observances have been abolished for ever; and only spiritual sacrifices and offerings can now be presented to God. But there is a way in which you can still carry out the spirit of the old sacrifices and offerings. You can bring to the Lord not the sweet cane itself, but the money got from the self-denial connected with the use of it. You hear often of weeks or other stated periods of self-denial, in which Christians band and bind themselves to give up some luxury for a time, and to give the money which would have been spent upon it to some good cause. Those who have no spare money, have it at least in their power to follow this method, and by denying themselves for a time the use of some superfluity that was a source of pleasure to them,

to save money for diffusing a greater amount of happiness in the world, and so giving to themselves in this form a higher satisfaction than they could have got from the indulgence itself. The blossom and seed which the sugar produces are better than the sweetness of the sugar itself which feeds them. Better expend the sugar, therefore, in producing blossoms for the heart and seed for the blessing of the world—than to keep it to yourself—to minister to your own indulgence alone. Thus you see how thoroughly in accordance with the law of self-sacrifice which God has impressed upon His dumb creatures, even upon the grass of the field—is your giving up your own richness and goodness for the enriching and blessing of the world. You are only doing consciously and willingly what the sweet cane is doing unconsciously and will-lessly. Seasons of self-denial and self-sacrifice for the cause of Christ are seasons of flowering and fruiting in the divine love.

Young people are fond of sweet things. This is a natural taste. The system in youth craves for sweets because of the deficiency

of sugar in the bread-stuffs and starchy food which children usually eat. Sugar is needed to keep up the warmth of the body—to feed the flame of life. There is nothing wrong, therefore, in indulging this craving to a reasonable extent. What you have to guard against is an excessive use of this good thing, whereby it becomes hurtful. If you spend every penny you get in buying sweets, you will create in yourselves by so doing a soft, luxurious habit of body and mind, which will be a bad training for your future life; and you will become selfish and self-indulgent. You will spend all your sugar on yourself! You will value only bodily sensations, and be incapable of getting out of your senses into the higher ranges of thought and spiritual being. Better far have the simple, manly tastes of the youthful Daniel, who refused King Nebuchadnezzar's dainties, and preferred plain living, in order that he might be capable of high thinking, and might have a healthy body, a pure nature, a free, strong will to control his appetites. And the money that you save in this way you can give to

the cause of Christ. It will be all the more precious, and all the more likely to prove a blessing, that it is the fruit of your self-denial.

It is in the spring-time of the year that the sugared sap begins to flow in our native sycamore or plane tree, which is the equivalent in our country of the sweet cane from a far country. That sap is the sign of the renewed life and energy of the tree ; and it is a provision of Nature for the quickening and feeding of the flower-buds, and for the formation of fruit and seed. I remember well in my schoolboy days how we used to make a deep incision in the bark of sycamore trees in the end of March, and hang a little dish below it to receive the sweet fluid that flowed copiously from the cutting. This fluid was very pleasant to drink ; and the people in Canada make every year maple-sugar in the spring-time in the same way. Now, as it is in Nature so is it in grace ; it is in the spring-time of life that the kindness and generosity of human nature are most developed. When the Holy Spirit quickens the soul out of its winter coldness and deadness,

He pours grace into the heart and the lips, and makes the whole life gracious. And God has given to you in your spring-time sweetness and generosity of disposition, and enabled you, by His grace, to store up in your young hearts loving and gracious qualities, not for your own enjoyment alone, but that with them you might be able to bless others. The heart's first duty is to find expression for itself; and as God who so loved the world found expression for that love by giving His only-begotten Son, so ought you to show your love to Him by giving your best. Has He to say of any of you upbraidingly, "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money?" Your money, your talents, your blessings—all your sweetnesses—you have lavished them all upon yourselves; and you have given God nothing of them for His service. Oh! what mockery upon many lips are the words so often sung:

"Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

The Flowering of Life

"O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more."

PSALM XXXIX. 13.

IN the original Hebrew, the word translated in our version, "recover strength," means literally to smile, or to become radiant in face—to undergo a kind of transfiguration. The Psalmist was plunged in deep distress of soul and circumstances, and struggled with the thought of death that seemed to be coming very near to him. To die

amid the consolations of kind friends and the religious sympathies of fellow-believers was painful; but it was doubly trying when wicked scoffers were taunting him with his sore afflictions, as a proof that he was cherishing a vain hope; that there was no God to care for him or to deliver him, and no compensation after death. He could not bear to pass away in such darkness and loneliness. It would be a lamentable failure of his life. He wished to be raised out of these gloomy depths of despair, and to recover the gladness and hopefulness of spirit which he used to possess when God's face shone upon him and all was well. "Oh, spare me," he says, "that I may smile again before I go hence, and be no more."

Have you ever noticed a little weed growing by the wayside, where it has almost no soil, and the ground is hard and dry? Its leaves are white with the dust of the road, and there is hardly any dew or rain to wash them clean and refresh them. In that unfavourable situation the little waif struggles hard to keep itself in existence, although you

would think that it had no pleasure in living. It will hold on to the very skirt of life with a firm grip ; it will refuse to part with its little heritage, though everything should frown upon it and try to extinguish it. For weeks it will keep up this pathetic strife, and it wearies not until it has got the purpose for which it was created fulfilled. What is that purpose ? It is to flower, to put forth its delicate blue blossoms at the top of its stem, that are like the sky that bends over it. In that flowering, the weed reveals its true nature, the beauty and brightness that are hid in its heart, the charming qualities of colour and fragrance and honey-sweetness that are concealed in its dull green foliage. The putting forth of these fragrant blue blossoms, whose nectar attracts insects to them to fertilise them, is the supreme act of the plant's life. It dawns in that flowering into a higher and fairer mode of existence, and by means of the seed which it forms by this process, it perpetuates its kind in the world from year to year and from age to age.

So vital, so all-important is this function of flowering, that no plant will die until it has attained to it, however unfavourable may be the circumstances in which it struggles to grow. To die without flowering would, for a plant, be a complete frustration of its whole life. And, on the other hand, when it flowers it is content to die, for it has attained the full glory of its life; it has revealed all its qualities and achieved all its possibilities. Its end in creation is served. The agave is said to live a hundred years before it flowers, and is called in consequence the "century flower." But the real fact is that the agave, growing in a parched desert, will cling to life until there are circumstances sufficiently favourable to make it break out into flower, even though it should have to wait a hundred years, for that flowering is all-important to the race in such hostile conditions. But if placed in favourable circumstances, on the other hand, it will flower in the course of four or five years, and then die at once in the exhaustion of the effort, for the object of its life is secured.

Now, it was with the Psalmist, when he wrote his doleful wail, as it was with the little wayside weed before it flowers. He would cling to existence, struggling with his unfavourable circumstances, until his life flowered. He wished to die in a manner becoming the greatness of his life, not in dark clouds of despondency and defeat, but in the bright sunshine of victory and joy. He wished that his life might be irradiated in the end, in order that the scoffers and unbelievers around him might see that after all his religion was not vain, and that his trust in God was not misplaced. Addison on his death-bed, wanted his friends to come and see how a Christian could die ; and the Psalmist wanted the old sceptics of his day to come and see how a man of God could die with a smile upon his face.

The prayer of the Psalmist is a natural prayer. The cry even of the old heathen hero to his gods was, " In light destroy us," willing even to perish if it were only in light. The passengers in a sinking ship cannot bear the idea of going down imprisoned in the

cabin or in their berths ; they seek the deck, where they may behold the free, open face of the sky and the sea, and pass away in the light of heaven. And so it is an instinct in our nature to long to escape from the darkness of our circumstances ere we die, to burst the gloomy walls of our woes, and perish, if we must, in the open air of a freer and fuller existence. There seems no such waste to us as that of a life that pursues its hidden course in a continual untimely twilight, and sets amid dark clouds. We wait for the sun-break which we feel ought to come, and crown it with the glory so long withheld. Death in circumstances of gloom is only a darker and drearier shade of the present gloom. There is no contrast, no compensation; and therefore we pray to be spared, that we may smile before we go hence and be no more. We feel that death will take our photograph, and fix our likeness for eternity far better when we smile than when we are in gloom.

It is easier to die when you are happy than when you are sad. When you are

happy you have not a feeling of failure and incompleteness. Your life has flowered, and may pass over to its natural decay. You can project your present enjoyment beyond the grave, and picture the eternal world as only a scene of greater enjoyment. Your desire for future and more perfect bliss arises from the large portion of bliss which you now experience. It is not gloom but brightness that is most akin to the nature of your eternal home. And therefore it follows that you are most in sympathy with, and likeness to, that future world upon which your hopes are set, not when you are plunged in deepest woe, but when you are elevated to the highest joy. Happy moments on earth connect themselves with joys in heaven, as sunbeams illumining your home connect themselves with the sun in the sky from which they come.

Every human life looks forward to its flowering as to its preparation for death. It is only when you have achieved something worthy, that you are content to die. Every young person has dreams of doing something

great and noble, that will benefit the world and win the applause of men ; something that will keep his life bright in the memories of mankind when he is gone—as the sun setting behind the purple hills in the west keeps the glory of its presence still on every golden cloud. And till he has fulfilled this great purpose of his life, he is not willing to pass away and be forgotten as an " inheritor of unfulfilled renown "—a dreamer of a dream too divine for earth to realise. The artist who is engaged in painting some great picture by which he hopes to become famous, prays to be spared till he has put the finishing touch to it ; and Raphael might well have died when he touched at last upon the very point of perfection, where art should cling, and his glorious picture of the Transfiguration, with the colours still wet upon it, was borne behind his bier in triumph to the tomb. The sculptor far gone in consumption fights against his disease till he has completed his statue, and made the cold marble breathe in the living form. The author writes with feverish haste the last pages

of his book, and longs that death may not come till he has written "finis" to it. What a beautiful picture is that of the Venerable Bede, dictating to his assistant the last words of the translation of the Gospels, and then, when they were written down on the parchment, calmly resigning himself to death, on the ground that his task was done! There is not a more touching story on record than that of David Gray the poet of Merkland near Kirkintilloch, who died in his twenty-fourth year. His life, he himself said, was not a life, but "a piece of childhood thrown away." Brought by consumption to the perilous edge of death, the one consuming desire which he had was to live to see his poems published. "If my book be not immediately gone on with, I may never see it. It is the only legacy I can leave to those who love me." By a fortunate accident, a specimen page reached him on the day before his death; and as he gazed upon it he seemed to feel as though the dream of his life were about to be fulfilled.

"Give us the earth's whole heart but once to know,
But once to pierce the secret of the spring—
Give us our fill, so we at last may go
Into the starless night unmurmuring."

We are told that the aged Simeon, who waited for years for the consolation of Israel, had it revealed to him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And when he held in his arms in the Temple the infant Saviour, the desire of his life was fulfilled, and he said, "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." His life had flowered in this glorious experience. And we deeply feel that our Lord's own life could not have passed away altogether in the gloom of a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, despised and rejected of men. We instinctively feel that some compensation must be made to Him even on earth, some revelation given of His true and transcendent glory. And therefore, when we are told of His transfiguration on the mountain, that His face shone as the sun, and His garments were white as the snow with the

glory of heaven, we recognise this burst of splendour as the fitting prelude to His death. We feel that He could not pass into the dark valley without this smile of heavenly radiance upon His face. He may well talk, we think, of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, when He was lifted above the pain of dying by the rapture of eternal life, and was transfigured with a light which the grave could not extinguish.

What a wonderful crisis in the life history of a plant is the cycle of flowering! We are so familiar with the sight that it is altogether commonplace to us. But if it occurred only once in a thousand years, it would appear almost a miracle and create the greatest astonishment. For it is a complete and sudden transformation of the whole nature of the plant. All at once and seemingly without any cause, the plant ceases to produce the dark green leaves which for some time it was putting forth monotonously, one after the other, and unfolds a different type of leaves altogether, with brighter hues and more elegant forms—with richer fragrance

and honey-sweetness. The blossom crowns the plant with a halo of glory ; it is transfigured into a higher nature ; it breathes after the manner of an animal ; it has kindred and ancestry ; it lives no more for itself, but for the future race that is to spring from it. And in this unselfish blessing for others, in this sacrifice of its own individual life for the race, all that is best and most precious in the plant comes out, and a beauty and fragrance and sweetness are revealed that were before unknown. The plant looks up to heaven with kindred hues, with the whiteness of the robes of the angels on its petals, and the gold of the streets of the New Jerusalem in its heart.

And what is there in the life-history of man that corresponds to this great floral change ? There are experiences in human life that develop its powers and unfold its beauties, which may be called a species of flowering. When the intellect expands, and in the creation of fresh forms of thought it returns to the truthfulness and simplicity of nature ; when the heart is satisfied by the realisation of a

pure affection, and there is associated with it, as there usually is, a love of beauty, of poetry and music, of generous thoughts and tender feelings, and an elevation of the whole being—such a change is to human life in some degree what the colour and fragrance of its blossom are to a plant. But the satisfactions of love, or the attainments of ambition, or the possessions of wealth yield only a temporary and partial beatification of life. They satisfy only a portion of the nature, and they last only a brief while. They belong to the sphere of the things that are seen and temporal, and therefore perish in the using. So far from being preparations for death, they are hindrances to dying. Such pleasures are the very things that make it hard to leave the world. When we have obtained them we do not sing our "Nunc dimittis" with willing hearts. Rather do we cling with greater tenacity to our earthly treasures.

Destitute of religious life, man only half lives. No matter how high may be his intelligence, how great his possessions, how rich and varied his sources of happiness

wanting the true life of the soul, existence lacks its chief zest, and there are many hours when he feels that all is vanity. The true flowering of human life is when the great change of regeneration takes place, consequent upon heartfelt belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. That faith transforms a man's whole nature. It makes him a new creature, with new hopes, new affections, new desires and aspirations. He no longer lives for selfish ends, but for the glory of God and the good of others. He shares in the self-sacrifice of the Redeemer, and glories in His cross. His life is transfigured; it displays the beauty of holiness; it diffuses the fragrance of heaven. This restoration in us of the image of God, in which we were created, is the only thing that is worth living for, and worth dying for. Till this great consummation has been reached there is a sense of incompleteness in the life, an aching void which nothing can fill. Till then the soul fears to enter into the dark cloud that conceals the future from its view. For the life is flowerless, whatever leaves of worldly success it may have produced; it has

not yielded the supreme and satisfying bliss, whatever else of joy it has given.

Has your life flowered in this gracious way by the help of God's Spirit? Does your life shine in the warm smile of God's favour, or is it still in the cold shadow of the world? Why are you hanging on to life from year to year, going through the same weary round of monotonous experiences? Perhaps the prayer of some of you, if you are candid enough with yourselves, is that God may spare you for the sake of some worldly advantage—till you have achieved success; till you have grown rich enough, and become persons of some importance; till you have matured all your plans. Or, perhaps, your prayer is that your life may be spared for the mere sake of living, for you have got used to life, and its familiar things have become dear to you by long habit and association, and you know of no higher life or better world. What is your life for? Is it only for buying and selling and getting gain? Is it only for the procuring of the mere means of life—of the meat and clothing for the earthly life that is so soon to

die? Why does God spare you from year to year, and load you with so many benefits? Is it not to give you what He never fails to give to every human being He has made—an opportunity of obtaining the one thing needful —the good part that shall not be taken away from you? Is it not that the goodness and the long-suffering of the Lord may lead you to repentance, and induce you to turn from all your idols to serve the living God?

Strain no longer, then, the lengthening cord of God's patience. Lay hold on the hope set before you in the Gospel. Secure on this the day of your merciful visitation a saving interest in Christ Jesus. And the attainment of the end of your faith—even the salvation of your soul—will take away all vanity from your life, and cause it to blossom forth in all its fulness of beauty and joy. In the smile that comes to you from on high all creation will be irradiated. You will feel that life is worth living, for the glorious fellowships which it gives you the privilege of enjoying—fellowship with God and Christ and all holy beings throughout the

universe. The higher your life, the more worthy does it seem to be lived, and the more impressed are you with the conviction of your own immortality. It is only when life is spent on low objects and on perishing things that you feel its worthlessness, and have doubts whether such a vain and useless life can be perpetuated beyond the grave. But the life of faith you feel can never end. Death to you can never be premature. However short your existence here, the object of the longest life will have been attained. Even the child shall die a hundred years old. You will not pass hence to be no more seen, but you will emerge from the transition shadow of death, as the dawn appears through the last filmy cloud that veils the sunrise, and your mortal shall put on immortality, and you will flower into eternal life.

The Well of Bethlehem

"And David longed and said, Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate."—2 SAMUEL XXIII. 15.

ONE of the things that I remember best about Bethlehem is the well of David. It is a few minutes' walk from the town, in the middle of an enclosed garden. It is not a spring, but a deep rock-hewn cistern, into which water oozes from the soil. A number of women were around it waiting their turn to fill their jars. One of them

tied a cord to a pitcher and let it down into the dark depths, and brought it up full of clear, sparkling water. I tasted it, and found it deliciously cool and pleasant. With the woman I noticed a little boy, with fair hair and bright dark eyes. I asked his name, and he shyly said, "Iesa." Was it not strange to see a boy whose name was Jesus in the very place where our Saviour was born? The name was always a common one in Palestine, and our Lord did not take an altogether new name which no other human being could have; but He took a common name, because He was in all things made like unto His brethren.

David was hiding in the cave of Adullam, amid the dreary parched valleys, a short distance down from Bethlehem; and his native town was in the hands of the Philistines. One day the heat was unusually great, and there was not a drop of water to be seen anywhere. You know how, by the law of contraries in our nature, a thirsty person dreams of flowing fountains and a hungry person of a table spread with all manner of

dainties, and we think more of the beauty of flowers in the desolate winter, when none are to be had, than in the bright summer, when they grow everywhere beside our path. So was it with David. The sun-scorched crags around him, and the dry, white bed of the streamlet below aggravated his thirst until it became unbearable; and just as the mirage —that wonderful picture of false lakes and streams—rises up in the desert before the eye of the parched traveller, so the picture of the well of Bethlehem, from whose sweet, cold waters he used to drink when he was a boy, rose up before his fancy's eye; and the passionate longing came from his lips: "Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" I could thoroughly sympathise with his feeling. When passing over the hot, dry hills of Judæa, where there was no green thing and no sparkle of running water, how I longed for a draught from one of the beautiful rills that come tumbling down the sides of my native hills far away. And when I did hear the long-banished music of a

laughing brook, its lullaby nursed me with the familiar sounds of home.

David's longing cry was heard by the men who formed his body-guard. As Tennyson has told us, in his "Idylls of the King," of the mighty deeds of Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, so David, the sweet minstrel of Israel, has told us, in the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, of the mighty deeds of his brave followers. But on this occasion they surpassed themselves. With swift feet they rushed up the hill to the ramparts of Bethlehem, broke through the lines of the enemy, and hastily filling a goat-skin with water, brought it back to the king. But David, thirsty as he was, would not drink the precious fluid. When he saw the devotion of his brave followers, he blamed himself for having exposed them to such danger by so thoughtlessly expressing his longing. He valued the water procured at such risk as if it had been the life-blood of the three heroes. "Is not this the blood of men?" he said. And therefore he poured it out upon the ground as a libation or offering to God, the

great Giver, who had inspired the sacrifice. Thus David's unselfish piety was as great as the bravery of his mighty men. His seeming waste of their gift was the highest use that he could have put it to. If it had been drunk, it would have refreshed his parched lips for a moment, and then the incident would have been forgotten. But by refusing it, and offering it to the Lord of heaven instead, its use remains through all the ages unexhausted, and its memory will be for ever cherished. The water spilt upon the ground rose up, as it were, in vapour to heaven, to form a beautiful cloud gilded by the sun, to adorn the sky and to be seen and admired by all eyes, and to fall again in fertilising rain and dew upon the ground, that but for it would have been barren.

Our Saviour, as we are impressively reminded every Christmas-time, was born in Bethlehem. But we have reason to believe that He never tasted of the water of the well of Bethlehem ; for His parents were obliged to leave the town soon after He was born, to escape the persecution of Herod. They fled

to Egypt and remained there till the cruel king was dead; and when they returned to their native land they went straight to Nazareth, and there Jesus lived for thirty years. And though for three years He went up and down the land on His great mission of love, we nowhere read that He visited Bethlehem. Only when He rose from the dead did He come in sight of this city; for Emmaus, to which He walked with His two disciples, has been proved to be near Bethlehem. And what a new interest and pathos does the walk to Emmaus acquire, when we thus connect it with Christ's only and farewell visit to His native place! But though He never tasted of David's well any more than He tasted of Jacob's well, He can say to us, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, 'Give me to drink,' thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." David's Son and David's Lord has done for us a far mightier deed than his three heroes did for him. He broke through all the hosts of hell to get for us the water of life. Worse far

than the Philistines, the enemies of our souls stood in the way; but He conquered them all and led captivity itself captive, having procured the gift of salvation for men. We cannot tell what the effort cost Him who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. He said, "I thirst," on the cross, and that was a more dreadful thirst than David experienced. He lost His life in seeking to satisfy our thirst. The water of life that He offers to our parched lips is indeed His own life's blood.

All these things come home with special power to your heart at Christmas-time. And surely you cannot turn away from or waste the gift that cost your Redeemer so much. You cannot be indifferent to this amazing proof of His love. The Bible before it closes records the last words of Jesus heard on earth: "Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." And so the year ere it closes repeats the same gracious invitation. The only wish that Jesus ever expressed, so far as we know, was for the

water of Jacob's well, when He sat weary and faint beside it. "Give me to drink." And His longing now beside the well of salvation is to drink the joy of saving you. Give Him this joy. Refresh the soul of your Redeemer by your deepest gratitude and most loyal service. He values the devotion of His followers as David valued the devotion of his three heroes. And in the end He will say to you, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink."

David, near his native place, within sight of the hills on which he kept his father's sheep, was thinking of his boyhood, and his longing for the dear old well was a home-sickness. Worn out with his manifold troubles and anxieties, he wished to be a child again, and the well around which he used to play seemed a kind of fountain of youth. If he could only drink of its water, all the heavy weight of the years would fall off his spirit and he would become young

again, with all the fresh hopes that animated him in life's morning. And how often do old people have the same feeling. When they are imprisoned in narrow cares, shut up in the cave of some vexing trouble, they long for the well of youth, for the old simple faith and trust, and the old unconscious gladness of childhood. They would give everything they possess to be able to feel and think as they once did. How delightful, then, must it be to dwell continually beside the fountain of youth ; to retain the faith and the love of childhood unchanged through all the years to the end, and to drink always of the old well, and find its water ever sweet to the taste.

You are now beside the well of Bethlehem. Ask your Saviour to give you help to draw from its waters, for the well is deep. And if any sin, or care, or trouble should at any time shut you out from it, be brave and courageous. Break through the opposing hosts. Manifest your Christian heroism, as young knights of the Cross ; your true chivalry of heart and life in resisting temptation,

in confessing Christ, in doing what is right, no matter how many enemies may oppose you. And your loyalty to Jesus will be richly rewarded. He will give you living water to quench your immortal thirst. You will have the fountain of youth always in your heart. He who was born a little child in Bethlehem, in order that all old things might pass away and all things become new, will keep you always young in feeling; and He Himself will be a well of living water within you springing up into everlasting life.

Treasures Hid in the Sand

"*Treasures hid in the sand.*"—DEUT. xxxiii. 19.

THE Jews did not like the sea, but God was to make one sailor in the sacred family. He was to make one of the tribes of the peculiar people, who were to represent all mankind, interested in a pursuit that was afterwards to be the greatest of all means of improving mankind and spreading the knowledge of the truth. The land of Zebulon was

to run along the side of the sea; and it was to have as its near neighbours the famous Phœnician towns of Tyre and Sidon, which carried on most of the shipping and commerce of the ancient world. The blessing promised to a tribe so situated must be something connected with the sea to make it suitable. Accordingly it was to suck the abundance of the seas; it was to get the fisheries of the coast, and all the good things which would pass on the seas in ships. It was also to get the treasures hid in the sand.

How romantic do the very words sound! You think at once of ships that have been driven ashore by storms, and have been broken to pieces there, strewing the sands with the valuable cargoes which they carried. You remember how the Spanish Armada was destroyed by a sudden and violent tempest that overtook it, and scattered the ships over the coasts of Scotland, some of them being wrecked on the western islands. One of them we know sank in the bay of Tobermory, and that ship was laden with gold and silver to pay the expenses of invading our country;

and all that treasure is lying somewhere in the sands off the shores of Mull. And young people are fond of reading about the pirates who used to sweep the seas and capture merchant vessels, and hide the spoil which they took from them on the sandy shore of some lonely island. Such treasures were often lost sight of, and the secret of their hiding-place was known only perhaps to a solitary survivor who lived in a far distant land. And many expeditions have been fitted up to go in search of these hidden hoards, like that of which Louis Stevenson speaks so charmingly in his book entitled "Treasure Island."

But it is not in the sands of the sea-shore only that treasures are hid. They are hid also in the sands of the desert. Great cities, containing much wealth and many beautiful and precious objects, have been covered over and entirely lost through the destroying sands of the desert drifting over them; and the wandering Bedouin has, for ages, pitched his tent on the mounds, unconscious that such wonderful ruins lay buried beneath. In Egypt they are digging on the sites of these

cities, and it is marvellous what they have found—grand palaces, temples, and tombs, that have shed much light upon the manners and customs of people who lived four or five thousand years ago.

One of the treasures hid in the sand of Zebulon was the remarkable shell-fish that yielded the splendid colour called Tyrian purple, with which the garments of the rich and noble used to be dyed. The people gathered this little murex and sold it to the merchants of Tyre, who manufactured the colour out of it, and sent it in their ships all over the world. They became rich, therefore, through this trade, richer than any of their brethren in the other parts of the land. You remember how Lydia, the first convert to Christianity in Europe, came all the way from Asia Minor to Philippi to dispose of her purple dye. It was a very valuable article, for a small mantle dyed with it cost over £100.

It was on the coast of Zebulon that the most wonderful, though most common, substance called glass was first discovered.

Some unknown persons in the far-off ages were making a fire of wood on the sandy shore in this part of Palestine, and they found, to their astonishment, on the spot, when the fire went out, a lump of a brilliant transparent stone which they had never seen before. This transparent stone was made by the chance mixing of the flinty sand of the shore with the alkali contained in the ashes of the wood-fire. No discovery ever made was more valuable than this. It has been turned to a thousand uses. It forms windows in our houses to let in the light, and at the same time to keep out the wind and rain. It forms spectacles by which old and young people can clearly see when their eyes have grown dim with age or defect. And every student who uses a microscope to gaze through its lenses upon the minute wonders of the world, or a telescope to look at the stars in the far-away heavens, will acknowledge that no treasure hid in the sand could be more precious than the glass by which he is thus enabled to vastly extend his knowledge of God's universe, and to

get the wisdom whose price is above rubies. There is one little instrument made of glass, called the spectroscope, which is perhaps the most wonderful thing in the world, for by means of it you can tell the nature of the substances that make up not only the sun and the planets, but also the materials of the remotest stars. And you can tell whether these remote stars are going away from you, or coming nearer to you in their mighty revolutions in space, although they are uncountable millions of miles away. Who could have thought that in the little wood-fire on the sandy shore of Zebulon was the germ of all the amazing discoveries of science which have made our modern world a true fairy-land!

How few of the treasures hid in the sand has the world yet found out! You remember how Sir Isaac Newton compared himself to a child walking on the sandy shore, and picking up a few bright shells and pebbles here and there, while the great ocean of knowledge rolled mysterious and unknown before him. And so you are walking on the

shore of eternity, picking up a few grains of truth from the sands of time, while in the unfathomed caves of ocean, "full many a gem of purest ray serene" is hid. But though much treasure may never be discovered, yet much that will make you truly wise and good may be discovered. And if you employ your time wisely and well, you may get what God gave Solomon—a largeness of heart even as the sand that is on the sea-shore.

And this reminds us that the most precious treasure of all is that which is pictured to you in the passing of the grains of sand through an hour-glass, counting the time. What strange changes, what striking histories have these grains of sand known, as they were slowly formed by the elements out of the ancient rocks, and blown about by the desert winds, or tossed to and fro by the billows of the ocean for countless centuries! And now they are imprisoned in this crystal shrine to be "the spy of time and the minister of thought." How valuable is each grain of sand as it glides through the narrow neck of

the glass, and goes to swell the little heap in the lower globe! How much it represents; seconds and minutes of your short life on earth that pass away and never return! Look at the end of December at the sand in the time-glass of the year. But a few grains remain in the upper globe. In a few hours these grains will all have run out to join their companions in the great heap below, and there will not be a single grain left in the glass. It will be perfectly empty. The year will have vanished with the last grain of it.

Time, like everything else, becomes more valuable the less you have of it. You never had so little of it as now. Prize it then all the more. Make the grains of sand in the glass to be to you treasures of unspeakable value, because they give you opportunity to lay hold on eternal life. Jesus has redeemed you, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with His own precious blood. How much more valuable, then, is your own soul than all the treasures of the world, known or unknown! It is the most precious

thing that Jesus, the Lord of the universe, knows. He puts it in the balance with the whole world itself, and He says, "What shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" And the gaining of your soul depends upon the way you improve the sands of time that are sinking so rapidly in the glass.

People expect that they will be saved somehow in time. Time does wonders, they say, and by-and-by they will be saved like others, even though they themselves are careless and idle. But this is a great mistake. Time itself does actually nothing. It is what is done in time, by other things which require time for their working, that accomplishes great results. The mere passing of time from you is like the passing of sand in an hour-glass. The sand itself is worthless; it is what you do during its passing that causes treasures, as it were, to be hid in it. The passing of the sand impoverishes your life, because it takes away its precious moments and makes your life shorter; it is the treasure hid in the sand, the wise use you make of the passing moments

which the sands count that makes you rich. You can make each grain of sand golden by laying it out to interest in the service of heaven. The river Pactolus of old had such a quantity of grains of gold in its sandy bed that Crœsus, the king of that country, was the richest man in all the world. In the sand of the stream of your life there are grains of gold which, if you search them out, as quicksilver searches out gold, and improve each shining hour, will give you the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hid in Christ Jesus. You will have treasure in heaven, treasure in your own heart, wealth of inward blessings, wealth of spiritual faith and saving knowledge, and Christian sympathy, and heavenly affection, of which neither life nor death can deprive you.

The Young Man in the Sepulchre

"And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment."—MARK xvi. 5.

IT was a wonderful sight that the women saw in the empty tomb of Jesus. The Lord was risen, but in the place where His body had lain in death there was an angel sitting, guarding the hallowed spot and filling the darkness of the grave with the light of heaven. It was a place of the utmost humiliation, but the vision of the angel within it

made it seem like the mercy-seat with its golden cherubims and cloud of glory in the holy of holies in the tabernacle. There is a charming legend, that when the tomb of the pious St. Elizabeth of Hungary was opened, long after her death, they found in it, not a decaying body, as they expected, but a heap of lovely flowers, whose fadeless bloom no soil of earth had nourished. The poor, withered remains of humanity had been changed to their astonishment into these shapes of heavenly beauty, which filled all the tomb with their light and fragrance.

As great must have been the surprise of the women to find in the sepulchre of Jesus, instead of the maimed and bruised body which they expected, a living inhabitant of the heavenly world. But it was not surprise only that they felt; they were affrighted. They had that strange sense of awe and fear, that mysterious, solemn feeling, which sudden contact with the eternal world produces in the minds of frail mortals, which we all experience in the presence even of the dead friends whom we knew best and loved most while

they were living. But the angel spoke gently to them and comforted them. He told them that they had no cause to fear, seeing that they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified. On such a high errand, nothing in heaven or earth could harm them. They were protected from all evil influences by the magic of the Name which is above every name.

The presence of the young man in the tomb of Jesus is a beautiful picture, upon which the imagination loves to dwell. It suggests many comforting thoughts to the mind, and is fitted to take away the fear of death and of the grave and of the great Beyond, which every one naturally has. The old Greek fable told about Proserpine, who was taken away by Pluto to the dark lower world, with the flowers still in her hand which she had been gathering in the upper fields, and who was permitted once a year to come back again to the glad sunshine of earth, to adorn the fields with the same flowers she had carried away with her. This beautiful fable spoke of the hopes of renewal beyond death which the wisest minds of the ancient pagans

cherished. When they saw the flowers of spring reappearing out of the dark earth, into which they had sunk out of sight during the previous winter, they said it was the return of Proserpine to the earth; and their hearts were filled with joy at the thought that thus, in some way that they knew not, in some more blessed spring than they could conceive, their own beloved dead would return to them, and the entombed past would bloom again. And so, when we too look into the empty sepulchre of Jesus, and see it filled by one who has come from the world beyond the tomb, we too cherish hopes which death cannot wither. Our Proserpine is not a mere poetic fable, but a glorious reality.

It was not a spirit, but a man, that appeared to the women in the sepulchre. The old pagans imagined that the world beyond death was inhabited, not by real human beings, but by shades—dim, misty ghosts of the departed; and thus while they believed in the immortality of the soul, they did not know about the resurrection of the body. They thought that the body was to perish utterly in the grave, to

be dissolved into dust, and to mingle with the universe; and that the soul, separated from it, was to exist in a disembodied state for ever. And what a strange, cheerless realm they pictured the world after death to be! It had no warm, homely, human feeling about it. One would shiver in it as in a perpetual Arctic night, with the mystic glimmerings of the Aurora Borealis overhead, instead of the blessed sunshine. And I am afraid that too many Christians have the same ideas regarding it. They forget what the Christian religion has done for them by its grand revelation of the future life, and its assurance that the body shall be raised up to become the partner of the soul for evermore. They forget what the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead teaches us—that the grave is an avenue that leads, not to a world of shades, or spirits, but to a world of real human beings. Jesus by His resurrection has joined heaven and earth together and made them both one, and has enabled us to recognise in the angels beings akin to ourselves, who can love and worship as we do, who can hold the closest

fellowship with us, and with whom we should feel perfectly at home. Human nature, though we have abused it by our sin, is the highest in the universe ; and when One who wears our nature sits on the throne of glory, we are not surprised that an angel from heaven should have appeared in the form of a man in the tomb of Jesus, to tell us that, as we have borne the image of the earthly Adam, we shall yet bear the image of the heavenly.

It was not an old man that the women saw in the sepulchre of Jesus, but a young man, fresh and fair, with the dew of youth upon him. They are all young in the world from which he came. Jesus whom they serve is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. The heaven in which they live has an eternal spring, where all old things have passed away and all things have become new, where the leaves never fade and the fruits never fall, and the sunshine never waxes dim and cold. What is it that makes our earth seem old and worn-out ? It is the sin that overshadows the life of man, and that takes the interest and enjoyment out of everything. We

become tired and satiated and old in heart before we have lived half our days. The mere flight of years does not age us, it is the pressure of anxiety and trouble. But in the home of the angels there is no care, no guilt, no sorrow, no fear, to make the hair grow grey and the heart sad, and to bring wrinkles over the smooth brow. Serving God day and night, the inhabitants go on from strength to strength in the freshness of immortal youth.

It was not a man dressed in sackcloth and ashes that the women saw in the sepulchre. He did not wear the black garments of mourning and woe. He was clothed in a long white robe, pure and stainless as the untrodden snow on the mountain-top ; dressed in the garment which Jesus wore on the Mount of Transfiguration, when He spoke of His decease at Jerusalem, and His raiment shone whiter than any fuller on earth could whiten it. When Theseus, in the beautiful Greek story, returned victorious from the Cretan expedition, having slain the monster which devoured the choicest young men and

maidens of Greece, he forgot, as he neared the coast of home, to hoist the signal of success. His ship sailed into port with black instead of white canvas; and his aged father, believing that all was lost, cast himself headlong into the sea and perished. But no such forgetfulness could be laid to the charge of the heavenly messenger in the sepulchre of Jesus. Not with black, but with white sails did his ship bring back from the eternal world the joyful tidings of the final and complete destruction of the monster which had devoured all living. The white robe is the dress of the redeemed in glory. They are free from every earthly spot, washed from every defilement in the blood of the Lamb, holy within and without, like the great white throne beside which they stand. How strange to see that pure unsullied dress amid the corruptions and defilements of the tomb! It is like the whiteness of the snowdrop coming out of the dark mould and the decayed leaves in the grave of the old year. It is a token surely that the dead lying in the tomb, asleep in Jesus, will be purified in the grave from all the stains of

their earthly nature, and presented faultless before the presence of God.

It was not a breathless messenger on a hasty errand that appeared to the women, but a young man with unruffled vesture, sitting calmly in the tomb. What a contrast between his attitude of repose and restful waiting, and the eager excitement and agitation of the women, terror-stricken by the earthquake and the awful noises which they had heard, and the strange sights which they had seen! His appearance was like a calm centre in a storm. On the parapets of the old Bridge of St. Angelo in Rome you see standing tall statues of angels, with their dresses blown about in many wild folds, as if with the stormy winds that come down the course of the Tiber. And in the Lateran church you see in the niches statues of apostles and prophets with hair and garments tossed about in disorder and tumult. This was the great Bernini's idea of saints and angels. But though, as Mrs. Browning says,

> "The wind that swept them out of sin
> Has ruffled all our vesture,"

there is no trace of the storm in the dress or demeanour of the bright inhabitants of heaven. The tomb itself is a place of incessant and rapid changes. Everything is hastening down to it, and everything in it is hastening to dust and ashes. The tread of the human millions is heard on their ceaseless march to it; and in it are engulfed all the wrecks of time, the ruins of Nature and the ruins of man. They all rush down to join there the dark kingdom of chaos. And yet here in this terrible whirlpool, like a rainbow at the foot of a waterfall, sits an angel of peace, undisturbed by the tumult, speaking of a world of eternal rest, where all earth's storms are hushed, and all earth's changes have ceased. The angel sits in the sepulchre; the Lord sits upon the floods; the Redeemer sits upon the throne; and "he that believeth shall not make haste."

It was a strange place for a messenger from heaven to be in. We read about an angel in the sun. That was a suitable place, we think, for such a glorious being to dwell in. But the dark place of decay and death seems

altogether unsuitable. And yet, as the bird has no fear on the swaying bough, for it has wings, and the fish has no terror in the dark abyss of waters, for it has gills and fins; so the grave has no terror or gloom to the angel, for he belongs to a deathless world, and cannot die. He brings heaven with him into the tomb; he sits there in his own atmosphere of light. I have seen in a picture-gallery in Italy a painting by one of the great masters, representing an angel standing at the foot of the vacant cross, taking up the crown of pain that had fallen from the brow of the dead Saviour, when His body was removed to the sepulchre nigh at hand. He passed his fingers gently over the blood-stained thorns, and as he did so a look of ineffable wonder lit up his countenance, as if the suffering of the Crucifixion were a mystery altogether beyond his comprehension. Such a look of wonder, we fancy, might have been on the face of the angel in the sepulchre, as he tried to realise what it was to die. It is one of the things which the angels desire to look into. He sees beyond

death; he sees the other side of it. He knows that the grave is not a place of defeat, but of triumph; not a place of final destruction, but of temporary rest. And he has come to the tomb of Jesus to tell us all this, so that we mortals can say, who have to pass through this dread experience, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The connection of the young man with the tomb of Jesus teaches the same cheering lesson which all Nature is teaching us every spring. Spring is the Easter of the year, telling us of the resurrection of Nature from the grave of seed and root and bud. Everywhere, if your eyes are opened, you will see the young man in the sepulchre—you will see the young life in the grave of the old life. Look at the fresh green blades that are springing up in April from the tufts of old, dry, withered grass in the meadows! Look at the tender, bright fronds that are growing out of the brown clumps of last year's decayed ferns in the woods! Look

at the buds unfolding their young, delicate foliage at the foot-stalks of the red autumn leaves still clinging to the uppermost branches of the beech-trees! Dig up the root of the wild hyacinth or the wild orchis, and you will see a new bulb sending up its green sprout from the side of the wizened and exhausted old bulb. Everywhere you see in the beautiful spring-time that every grave is a cradle; that in every sepulchre there is a young unfolding life which is to take the place and serve the purpose of the old life that has passed away. And how bright and shining is the clothing of the new young life that thus appears in the tomb of the old! The old grass, that was cropped by the cattle, and trodden underfoot, and bleached by the autumn and winter storms, becomes the bright green transparent blades which shine in the sun, and seem like tiny spears made of living emeralds. The dry, brown leaf, that was eaten by insects and shrivelled by heat and cold, recovers its freshness and beauty in the young foliage, which is as perfect to-day as the leaves that

first unfolded in Eden. The ideal shape and hue which the old leaves had missed or overgrown comes back in each young leaf. And what a contrast is there between the dark, rugged trunks and branches of the trees, and the lovely, tender foliage that springs out of them as if by magic in the delightful spring days! There is no beauty like that of the spring flowers, no greenness like that of the spring grass and the spring foliage. The angel that appears in the shining garments of heaven in the sepulchre every year at Easter has a loveliness surpassing all other loveliness. His transformation effects are the great miracle of Nature, which is new to us, however often we have seen it, and always fills us with surprise.

Now, as it is in the world of Nature, so is it in the human world. He who sent the young man to the old sepulchre—old as the tombs of the Pharaohs, old as the cave of Machpelah, as the grave of Abel outside the wall of Eden—and who puts a bud beside every withered leaf, places a child beside the old man, and a young man in the sepulchre of his

father. Every death involves a birth. God continually renews His world in this way; and when one generation passeth away, another generation cometh. And how beautiful is the shining dress of the young man in the sepulchre! How lovely is the fresh life of the young! What an interest and a hope do they give to the world! What an air of heaven do they bring with them into this old and worn-out wilderness, causing it to bud and blossom as the rose! What a restfulness to careworn, toil-driven man there is in their trust and simplicity! What an opportunity is given to young souls to profit by the experiences of their fathers, and to make life truer to its ideal—a fairer and nobler thing than they made it! We entertain, in our children, angels unawares. In the old Greek story it was an aged couple who lodged the gods, and yet knew it not. But the young always see the gods. They have the vision and the faculty divine. Heaven is about them, and the films of earth have not yet had time to gather and obscure their clear, open vision. The heavenly

euphrasy has purged their eyes, and they see the glory of the world, and realise that it is not a world of death, but of life. Their angels do always behold the face of the Father. Everywhere they see the angel in the sepulchre, while older eyes see only the emptiness and the gloom of death.

But not only is the young man in the sepulchre meant to show that for every death of the old in the world there is a new life coming on. Each of us has this strange union of life and death in ourselves; each of us is like the young man sitting in the sepulchre, so far as we ourselves are concerned. We are two natures in one—a mortal and immortal. The immortal part of us is sitting, as it were, in the grave of the mortal. We are dying daily, in order that we may live eternally. The outward man is decaying, in order that the inward man may be renewed more and more. And no one can possess the secret of a happy life who has not learned that this life is but a tomb for the growth, in the midst of the decay of the natural substance which enfolds and cherishes

it, of that germ of eternal life which is planted by Jesus Christ in believing hearts. The young man in the sepulchre teaches us that the true way to preserve our youthfulness always, in a changing and decaying world, is to die to all that Jesus died to, and to live for all that Jesus lived for; so that out of the grave of our sinful, selfish nature may come, stronger and purer, our eternal life. And then the tomb to us will always have the angel of hope sitting in it, taking away its gloom by his shining presence, and speaking to us who seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified, of that last most wonderful miracle, whereby those who are conformed to the death of Christ shall know the power and the blessedness of His resurrection.

The little birds in their nests open their mouths wide for food when a shadow passes over them, mistaking it for the mother-bird; and so what we in our nest mistake for death is really the shadow of God come to satisfy our soul with long life. Let us welcome His shadow, then, when it comes, assured that "this God is our God for ever and ever,

and He will be our guide even unto death," or, as the words should be properly translated, "He will guide us into eternal youthfulness." Some scholars have supposed that the Gospel of St. Mark closes with the account of the appearance of the young man in the sepulchre, after telling the reader that the women who saw the wonderful sight fled from the sepulchre, "for they were afraid." They regard all the rest of the chapter in our version, from the ninth verse to the end, as a spurious addition by a later writer. And the reason why they suppose this is, that the concluding verses in question are wanting in several of the oldest manuscripts of greatest authority. In answer to this, it may be said that there are more convincing proofs of the genuineness of these disputed verses than of their having been fabricated by another hand. But, apart from such critical arguments, we cannot believe for a moment that the Gospel which exhibits Jesus Christ mainly on the side of His power, as the "strong son of God," could break off abruptly amid tokens of human alarm. It cannot leave its readers

terror-stricken at a grave ; it must go on to speak of the power of the risen and ascended Saviour—just as we find it does in the closing verses of our version, which satisfy our instinct for a fit and appropriate ending. And so we cannot believe that the close of the chapter of life is meant to lead any one trembling and afraid to a grave, and leave him there. On the contrary, for every one who has had sweet and holy communion with the Lord Jesus, the chapter of life which records the loving intercourse closes with the cheering words of hope, "Arise, let us go hence." God will not guide you unto death, and leave you there ; He will guide you, by the young man in the sepulchre, to the glorious immortality beyond. For the real life lies beyond, and can be reached only through death. The grave is the true fountain of youth, the only place where you can be made altogether young, from which you will come forth to be made alive and young for evermore.

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